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THE

THEOLOGICAL WORKS

OF

THE MOST REVEREND

JOHN SHARP, D.D.

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A SERMON

ON

PHILIPPIANS IV. 6.

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

THIS is the philosophy that was taught by Christ and his apostles, and ought to be learned and practised by all of us, if we would make good the name we give ourselves of being Christ's disciples. We should *take no thought for our lives*, as our Saviour expresseth it, but in all things depend upon the Divine providence, *without whom a sparrow doth not fall to the ground*, and by whom *the very hairs of our heads are numbered.*

We should *cast all our care upon him that careth for us*, as the apostle expresses it, and be so satisfied with every thing that comes from his hands as to *rejoice evermore*, and in every thing to give thanks, *which is the will of God concerning us.*

We should not discompose our minds either with tormenting reflections upon our present circumstances, or with solicitude for what is to come: but leave the government of the world to God, refer to him the management both of the public and our private affairs, no further concerning ourselves about the events of either, than only to do our own duties in our place and station, and by hearty prayer and supplications and thanksgivings to recommend ourselves and all our concerns to the mercies of God.

This, I say, is the Christian philosophy; and O, what happy lives should we all of us lead, if we lived up to it! what outward condition could be made so bad as to render us miserable! how many anxieties and fears and disquietudes should we be freed from, which do imbitter oftentimes the most prosperous fortune, and what ease and comfort should we find in the most calamitous! In our prosperity we should rejoice in the enjoyment of that portion of good things which God had vouchsafed to us, and even in our heaviest afflictions we should in hope and patience possess our own souls.

But, alas! though we call ourselves Christians, yet few of us do practise this point of Christianity, or so much as endeavour to do it: where is our indifference to the world, and our dependence on God? where is that *moderation* of ours which St. Paul, in the verse before my text, requires us *to make known unto all men;* that equanimity and contentedness which we ought to express in every estate and condition in which God hath placed us; that absolute resignation of our souls to the will of God? Alas! we are so far from letting this be known unto all men, that on the contrary we live in the world, and pursue our designs, as if there was no God that took care of human affairs, or from whom we were to expect either rewards or punishments! Our life is a perpetual drudgery, our heads are always full of care and thoughtfulness, anxiously labouring for this or the other thing, carrying on this or the other project, without either looking up to God in the choice of our designs, or depending upon him in the management of them, or acquiescing in the success and event that he gives them.

But since we are thus affected, what wonder is it that the most of us live miserable all our days, some starving in the midst of plenty, others murmuring at their low condition; both sorts discontented at every thing, fearful of every thing, restless and impatient, and ever complaining? These are the natural effects of carefulness without depending upon God.

Let us all therefore, if we mean either to live like Christians, or to enjoy a tolerable happy life in this world; let us, I say, charge ourselves with the practice of St. Paul's advice in my text, *to be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication and thanksgiving, to make our requests known unto God.*

Be careful for nothing; that is the first part of the advice here given us; and of this point I shall treat at this time: and that which I shall now do, is to give an account of this precept or advice, and with what limitations and restrictions it is to be understood: indeed, if we do not rightly inform ourselves about this, we shall make mad work of it.

Some, when they hear it said, *be careful for nothing*, in general terms, *take no thought for your lives*, and the like, will be apt to draw very comfortable doctrine from hence to themselves in favour of their idle, dissolute lives. This advice suits with their humour as much as is possible; for they matter not how little care they take. All the happiness they court in this world is a life free from thoughtfulness and business, and wholly employed in the present pleasures that are before them.

These are the *sluggards* that Solomon so often speaks against, that would spend their days in a profound ease and rest, without forecasting or design-

ing, without employing either their heads to think, or their hands to labour, but living from hand to mouth, and taking what chance, or their provident forefathers, without any care of theirs, have given to them.

But this precept we are upon gives little encouragement to men to live at this rate: for though the proposition be so worded as to seem to forbid all manner of carefulness, yet it means nothing less.

Indeed it is impossible to live without caring, at least to live happily: the souls that God Almighty hath given us are in their own nature infinitely active and vigorous, and their powers must constantly be exercised in pursuing some design or other, doing some work or other, otherwise we shall live the lives of plants or brute creatures, but not of men: and what designs soever they pursue, their natures will incline them to attend to, and lay out themselves vigorously upon. The blessedness of mankind doth not consist in sitting still, but in being constantly busy, constantly in action; only that action and business ought to be such as is suitable to the nature of our spirits, that is to say, such as is exercised about the noblest and best objects, and is managed by the rule of reason and virtue.

Careful then we must be. But what then doth St. Paul mean when he saith, *be careful for nothing?* Why certainly he doth not exclude all objects from our care, but only those of one kind, that is to say, the things of this world, the things that concern our bodies and our outward condition; such as food or raiment, wealth or reputation, the success of our designs, and the like. We are to be careful for none of these things, but to refer our-

selves wholly to God's pleasure concerning them. But there is another sort of things which it concerns us all to be infinitely careful about, that is to say, the affairs of our souls; to serve God, to do good in our generation, to get virtuous habits, to live innocently, and piously, and usefully, and by that means to lay up a good foundation against the time to come, that we may obtain eternal life. As to these things, we must not say we will refer it to God to work them in us; he made our souls, and we will trust them with him. No, (as one of the ancients expresseth it,) he that made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves. Our care about these things cannot be too great; nay, in truth, if we do not lay out the greatest part of ourselves about them, we are in danger of falling short of our aims. For *the gate that leadeth to life is*, as our Saviour tells us, *a strait gate*, and whoever will enter into it must not only *seek*, but *strive;* that is, must use the same diligence, and earnestness, and vigorous application, that those do who *strive for mastery*. We *must press forward*, as St. Paul testifies of himself, *towards the mark*, in order to our *obtaining the prize of our high calling in Jesus Christ;* imitating those that run in a race, who put out their whole strength to be first at the goal. Lastly, if we will obtain salvation, *we must work it out with fear and trembling*, as the same apostle hath told us; that is, our highest care, solicitude, and watchfulness, will be little enough to effect it.

This therefore is the first thing to be observed in the explication of this text, that it is the care of worldly things only that is here forbidden us. But what, then, is all care for worldly things forbidden us

by our religion? God forbid! for that would open a door to sloth and laziness, and all the evil consequences of it. No certainly, (which is the second thing I desire to take notice of in the explication of this text,) for all this command of being *careful for nothing*, a just care even for worldly things, is not only allowable to Christians, but incumbent as a duty upon them. We are so to take care of food and raiment, as honestly to labour for them; and *he that will not work ought not to eat*, as this very apostle hath elsewhere told us. We are so to take care of our family, as by our diligence and good husbandry to make competent provision for them, suitable to their degree and quality, otherwise we are worse than infidels, as he tells us in the same place. What wants, or necessities, or evil circumstances soever we are under, or do fear may come upon us, we are to take such care of ourselves as to use all the means we lawfully can to get out of them, or to avoid them. We are not to think we are so to depend upon God for all outward things as to abandon the use of means; though we must in all conditions, and for all things, *make our requests known to God by prayer and supplication*, yet we must never expect to obtain what we pray for, unless we ourselves contribute our endeavours towards it. It is enthusiasm even to madness, to think that all we have to do in this world is to give up ourselves wholly to contemplation and devotion: and as for the things that are necessary for our outward being and conveniency, only to look up to God for them, as if he was to find us with meat from heaven, or cure our diseases without our making use of physic. No! God's blessing and our care always go together. If

we do not stir to help ourselves, and vigorously put forth all those powers that he hath given us for that purpose, we do in vain look for help from above, how earnest soever our prayers and supplications be.

Care therefore we must, even for our worldly concernments, if we would have any of them to prosper: nay, so necessary is this worldly care I speak of, that it is questionable whether any man can light into such circumstances of life, that he can be lawfully excused from it.

All those that have callings (as the greatest part among us have) are certainly bound to follow them with a conscientious care and diligence: and as for those whose circumstances do not oblige them to follow any particular direct calling or profession, yet ought they to have care too: idly and slothfully they must not live; some designs and business they must pitch upon, wherewith to employ themselves innocently and usefully; otherwise they will not be able to give any tolerable account of their time or their talents unto God: and no design can be pursued to any purpose, without care and application of mind. But if it be thus, what kind of care is here forbidden? or what are the limits or the measures with which we are to bind our cares for earthly things, and which if we transgress we sin against the precept that is here given us, of *being careful for nothing?* Why, in answer to this, I say, in the third place, that all the unlawful cares here forbidden may conveniently enough be reduced under these two heads; immoderate care and solicitous care: of both these I shall speak; but of the first more largely, because it requires a little more explaining.

First then, in the precept of *being careful for nothing*, is forbidden all immoderate care for worldly things; that is to say, when the degree of our care exceeds the worth of the thing cared for; or, which comes all to one thing, when our care for temporal things, which are of smaller concernment, is greater than for spiritual, which are much more momentous; as when we take more care to be rich than we do to be good; when we study more to get a reputation amongst men, than to approve ourselves to God; when we are more solicitous to get out of the present evil circumstances, in which we perhaps are, than to avoid eternal damnation. What is excessive or immoderate care, if this be not? and yet the greatest part of mankind, God knows, are guilty of it; but it is just the same extravagance as it is for a man to be more concerned at a prick of his finger, than for a gaping wound in his side, through which his soul is ready to depart. The greatest interest we have to secure in this world is the everlasting happiness of our souls, and, in order to that, the fear and service of God. This therefore we ought in reason to place our first and chiefest care upon: this is to be our main design, and all our other designs are to be subservient to this, and to be managed wholly in subordination to it, so as they may best promote it. If now we do indeed thus think with ourselves and thus act, then is all our care for the world, how great soever it be, lawful and commendable. *If we first seek the kingdom of God and the righteousness thereof*, then be we never so busy and careful of our secular affairs afterwards, we do not amiss; our care is sanctified, it is not immoderate. But when we either serve mammon only, and God

not at all, or would serve both God and mammon, divide ourselves between religion and the world, and not make religion our main business, to which the other is to yield; (as it is most usual amongst men;) in this case our care for the world is immoderate, it is greater than it ought to be, and we are justly to be reproved for it. And whatever we may at present think of ourselves, we shall, it is to be feared, if we do not amend this matter, prove at last the *thorny ground* in the parable, where the *good seed* being sown *the thorns sprung up and choked it;* that is, as our Saviour interprets the parable, *the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches* will render the word of God and all our good purposes unfruitful and ineffectual.

This point is of so great importance to every one of us, that I cannot think it sufficient to have given this general account of it, unless I also caution you against some particular things, which, wheresoever they are found, are either instances, or expressions, or shrewd signs of an immoderate care for worldly things; such a care as cannot consist with the minding the better part, *the one thing necessary.*

And in the first place; one instance of this unlawful care is the giving so much of ourselves to our worldly business and concernments, of what kind soever they be, that we do not allow ourselves sufficient time for the exercise of devotion and acts of religion properly so called.

Far am I from thinking it necessary that Christians should spend either all or the greatest part of their time in prayer and meditation; no! there is a great deal of other work and business very needful to be done, which our callings, and the way of living

God hath put us into, will exact from us, in which we shall find enough, and sometimes too much employment for ourselves; and I cannot say but this worldly business, though it be drudgery and toil in comparison of the work of religion, yet if it be managed conscientiously, and in the fear of God, is as truly an instance of serving God, and is as acceptable to him in its season, as even the being at our religious offices, and sometimes perhaps more. But then whosoever doth so wholly attend upon this, as to allow himself no time for the immediate service of God, or but little and seldom, it is impossible that ever religion should prosper in such a man's hands.

As God, who gave us all our time, ought in reason to have some portion of it devoted to him, and accordingly hath so commanded; so, if he had not, the very nature and temper of our minds would have made it necessary, if ever we meant to preserve them in a religious frame.

We may talk what we will, but it is no more possible to maintain the spiritual, divine life within our souls, without frequent and constant retirements, and taking times for reading and prayer and meditation, than it is to maintain the life of our bodies, without a constant supply of meat and drink.

I could heartily wish this was seriously taken notice of; for the not observing this point hath, I am afraid, done mischief to many souls. Several there are that at some times, through some extraordinary providence of God, and the motions of his holy Spirit, are awakened to a very lively sense of their duty, and very strong and vigorous resolutions they make; and for some while they live up to them,

that is, so long as that sense lasts, being very careful of their actions, and having a very comfortable relish of God and goodness upon their spirits.

Why now might not these men always live thus? why certainly with due care they might; and not only so, but daily grow better and better; but, alas! we see they often do not; for you shall find many of these that began to live so well, after some time to lose all their sense of piety, and to grow as careless and unconcerned for their souls as ever they were. I do not deny but there may be many concurrent causes to produce this alteration in them; but this I am very confident of, that a main one is that I am now speaking of; namely, the neglect of frequent recollections, the not taking constant times of prayer and reading and renewing their holy purposes, and fetching new supplies of strength and vigour from the throne of grace, but suffering worldly business or cares to steal away their hearts insensibly.

This therefore you must fix as a certain immoveable principle in your minds, that how urgent and pressing soever the business of your calling or of your lives be, it must not put the thoughts of religion out of your head for any long while together: there must be a time and leisure found for the minding the work of that; nay, so necessary is this, if you mean to save your souls, that the allowing yourselves time for eating and sleeping is not more.

To define or prescribe the precise portion of time that every one is to give to God and the concernments of his soul, is a thing not only unnecessary, but unreasonable; because the conditions of men are so infinitely various, both as to their outward and their inward circumstances: some men can allow

more time from their necessary business and occasions than others can, and some likewise stand in need of more retirements and set devotions and meditations than others do: however, one day in a week God Almighty has bound us all up to by consecrating it to his immediate service, and he that makes no conscience of observing that day religiously, it is certain he hath no sense of religion at all, but is either a perfect worldling or epicure.

But one day in a week, spent in devout exercises, will hardly, I fear, be sufficient to secure, much less to advance our spiritual concernments. We every day think fit to give food and refreshment to our bodies; why is it not as fit we should every day be as kind to our souls, by giving them the repasts of prayer and other holy exercises; whoever doth not take that course, will, I dare say, advance but little in holiness and virtue. Nay, if we mean to thrive in spirituals, so far must we be from letting our business hinder or stifle our daily devotions, that we must live so above it, and have our thoughts so loose from it, as to be at leisure several times in a day to raise up our minds unto God, and to think of the great work we have undertaken, and to implore the Divine grace to carry us on in it, to thank him for his continued mercies to us, and to reinforce our purposes and resolutions of serving him all the days of our life.

O that we would all thus have our conversation in heaven, thus maintain communion with God, while we are a doing the work of this world!

But, however, if we cannot or will not raise ourselves to this pitch of devotion, yet, as we love our souls, no business, no worldly care, must hinder us

from setting apart every day some portion of our morning and evening for religious uses; and not only doing so ourselves, but allowing all our servants the same liberty, and calling upon them to make use of it: but I leave this.

In the second place, our care is then also immoderate and unlawful, whenever it puts us upon the use of unlawful or suspected means for the gaining our ends; let our designs be what they will, never so innocent, never so laudable, nay, never so necessary to our wellbeing, or even being in this world, yet if for the accomplishing of them we can find in our hearts to strain a point of conscience, or to engage in any practice that we have reason to believe is against the laws of God; this is an undeniable argument that we love the world better than God, are more the servants of mammon than we are of our Lord Jesus: for if we will be his disciples, we must not do the least evil that good may come of it; if we do, *our damnation is just*, as St. Paul hath told us.

They therefore that, in their conversation or dealing with others, can cheat, or overreach, or defraud; nay, can deliberately tell a serious lie, or make use of the least indirect art or trick for the serving their own ends; such men have their affections too much set upon the things of this world to be ever able to approve themselves sincere disciples of Jesus Christ; and of the same strain are those that practise any superstitious art for the bringing about their worldly purposes; as for instance, applying to wise men, as they call them, for the resolving hidden questions, making use of charms, or other magical tricks, for the recovery of stolen goods, or the cure of diseases, or the like. These things are perfectly unlawful to

Christians, as being a departing from the ordinary methods of Providence (wherein alone we are to seek for help under our necessities) to ways of the Devil's finding out.

The sum of this point is this: so long as we prosecute our designs in honest and regular ways our care is laudable; but to make use of the least indirect means for the bringing them about (nay, though it were for the saving our own lives) is an argument of immoderate worldly care; and we ought not to do it.

But, thirdly, our cares for this world are not only immoderate, when they put us upon the practice of such courses as are apparently unlawful for the bringing about our designs, but also in this other instance, when our hearts are so set on the business we are upon, as that we lose all sense of what is fit and decent with respect to ourselves or others; when for the bringing about our worldly ends we matter not how we defraud either our bodies, or our credit, or our families, or our neighbours, of what is their due; though perhaps nobody can say, that by any one of these single instances we do any thing that is directly unlawful or forbidden, or, if it is, at least it is not commonly thought so.

To explain myself a little. To our bodies we are unjust, when we drudge and toil, and take more pains in our worldly concerns than our strength or our health will bear, or when out of covetousness we deny ourselves the necessary refreshments and supports of life.

And so likewise we are unjust to our credit when we do not live like ourselves; that is, suitably to that degree and quality we are in, or to that estate and

fortune that God hath blessed us with; but out of a scraping penurious humour live meanly and sordidly.

The same thing makes us also defraud our family of their due; namely, when we do not make necessary provision for them, such as befits our condition, or when, to save charges, we do not give our children that education which their birth and our estates entitle them to.

Lastly, our neighbour hath also a due from us, which our worldly-mindedness doth too often hinder us from paying, but which yet God will severely require from us: as, for instance, when it makes us churlish, or unkind, or inhospitable to those about us, when it shuts up our hearts and our hands against the poor, and those others that have need of our charity.

All these are instances of inordinate care, and in whomsoever we meet with them, we may too truly say of that man, that he is too much addicted to this world, his heart is viciously set upon it.

And thus much let it suffice to have spoken of immoderate care for worldly things, together with the usual expressions and instances of it, which is the first thing here forbidden: but this is not all.

In the second place, as our care for worldly things ought not to be immoderate, so neither ought it to be solicitous; that is another, and indeed the main thing that we are cautioned against both in this text and in some other passages of the scripture, that speak of care in an ill sense. They mean such a care as is accompanied with fear and anxiety, attended with doubts and distrusts; such a care as grates upon our minds, and disturbs our repose; such a care as is restless and impatient for success, and

discontented at all success that is not just according to its own desires. Lastly; such a care as will needs carve for itself, and will not let God govern the world. This is that solicitous care that is here spoken of: *Be careful for nothing*, saith the apostle; *Take no thought for your lives*, saith our Saviour.

What, no care, no thought? that, I have already told you, is idle and extravagant: but thus; Let not your concerns for the most necessary things of this life distract your minds, or draw you off from an entire dependance upon God and submission to his will; but whatever circumstances you are in, whatever designs you are carrying on, endeavour to preserve yourselves in an even, peaceful, composed temper, absolutely resigned to the will of God: set not your hearts so much on any thing in this world, as to desire it with passion and anxiety; nor let any disappointment transport you to anger or impatience. Take care to do your parts towards the effecting your designs by doing your honest endeavours, and using such means as a prudent man in such cases would do. And likewise take care to recommend yourselves and your concerns heartily to God by prayer; but when you have done this, trouble not yourselves about the success, much less doubt of his goodness or providence, but leave the event of all wholly to him. Let him do as he sees fit, and whatever it be that he sends, be the issue of things answerable to your expectation, or be it not, murmur not, repine not, but let your heart rest satisfied, and thank the divine Goodness. You are perhaps in poor and low circumstances in the world, you have just enough to live from hand to mouth, and that is all: why, do not disquiet yourselves for this, nor torment

your minds how you and your poor children shall be able to live in time to come, when age or sickness shall seize upon you: leave that to God: do you for the present labour honestly to get a livelihood, and commit the rest to him; thank God for the present, and be not solicitous for what is future; and thus in all other cases wherein you happen to be concerned. This, my brethren, is that spirit and temper which all of us that call ourselves Christians should labour after; for this was the temper of our Lord Jesus, and this he hath most earnestly recommended to all his followers.

I own, that to bring ourselves to such an indifference to the things of this world, as this temper supposeth, is a very high attainment, and seems extremely difficult to flesh and blood. But yet, methinks, to flesh and blood, assisted by the omnipotent Spirit of Christ, it should not be difficult; or if it be, I am sure we shall surmount those difficulties, if we could once prevail upon ourselves seriously to set about this work.

Now for the engaging all of you so to do, I shall briefly lay before you some of those arguments and reasonings that are made use of in the New Testament for the enforcing this duty; which is the second head I proposed in speaking to this point.

Many excellent discourses upon this subject are to be met with in the gospels and the writings of the apostles; but none, I think, more strong, more moving, more persuasive, than our Saviour's discourse in the ten last verses of the 6th of St. Matthew, where indeed the chief arguments that can be offered against this worldly carefulness and solicitude that we have all this while been speaking of, are summed up, and brought together in one view.

These, therefore, I shall just give an account of, and so conclude. His first argument, why we should not be careful or solicitous for the things of this world is, that the greatest blessings and enjoyments which we have, come to us without our care and solicitude, and therefore why should we trouble ourselves much about the least? Thus, (in the 25th verse, where he begins this discourse,) *I say unto you*, saith he, *Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, and what ye shall drink; nor yet for your bodies, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?*

The force of which argument lieth here:

God hath given you your lives without any care or study of yours; and is he not much more able to give you food to maintain that life without your care? God hath given you your bodies without any labour of yours; and is not that a more desirable and extraordinary gift than the clothes that cover that body? If therefore God hath taken care to give you the greater things without your study and contrivance, can you imagine that he will refuse to give you the lesser?

A second argument against care and thoughtfulness our Saviour gives us in the next verse; *Behold*, saith he, *the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?* What can be more strongly said to the present purpose than this? If God takes care of the meaner sort of creatures that have life in them, *the fowls of the air*, so that they shall be provided of all things that they need, and that without any care of theirs, is it not unreasonable to sus-

pect his kindness to mankind, who are a thousand times more dear to God than the fowls are? Can it be supposed that God will forget them, when he remembereth *the fowls of the air*, and *the beasts of the field*, and the most inconsiderable things *that creep upon the face of the earth?* And as for matter of clothing, as our Saviour goes on, who can be more gorgeously and splendidly appareled than *the flowers of the field? and yet they toil not, neither do they spin;* yet admirable clothing God hath given to them, even that beauty, *that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them:* and can we imagine, as our Saviour urges, that these poor things, which to day flourish, and to-morrow are withered or burnt, that these shall partake of the care of God Almighty, and that mankind shall be neglected and overlooked by him?

It is therefore a very unreasonable thing to be anxious and solicitous about either food or clothing, which yet are the most necessary things in the world; since we see these creatures that take no care at all about them are yet continually supplied out of the divine bounty. And certainly if God's providence extends to the meanest of his creatures, much more will it be concerned to make provision for the best and the worthiest, supposing they live as they ought to do, and do not by their wickedness put themselves out of God Almighty's care and protection.

A third argument our Saviour useth upon this occasion is drawn from the unprofitableness of our cares for worldly things: *Which of you*, saith he, *by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?* If you had never so much a mind to be taller than

you are, yet you cannot, with all your solicitous endeavours, add an inch to your height. Nay, as he elsewhere speaks, with all your care *you cannot make one hair white or black;* but those things come by the providence of God, and not by your care: and the case is the same as to all other worldly events; you may harass your minds as much as you please, to obtain this or the other thing, but still, unless God pleaseth to send you the thing you desire, you are never the nearer obtaining it. You can no more procure to yourselves health, or greatness, or children, or long life, unless God pleaseth to give you them, than you can add half a yard to your stature. For the success of all your endeavours about these things depends upon such causes as you have not the disposal of, but only God Almighty. To what purpose therefore should you place your care and thought upon such things as are not in your power; especially, in the fourth place, considering that God hath prescribed you a method of obtaining all those things you stand in need of without an anxious care and thoughtfulness: and that is the fourth argument our Saviour here useth.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. That is to say, In vain it is to bestow your whole care and endeavours upon worldly things, when you may come by them a much easier way, and a way too that is certain, and will not fail you; and that is this: do but make it your main business to secure to yourselves the kingdom of heaven, and, in order thereunto, to possess yourselves of that righteousness and purity and holiness, that will qualify you for it; and then God will take care that

you shall never want food nor raiment, nor any other thing that is needful for you in this world. If you will study to serve God, and approve yourselves to him by living piously and virtuously, you need not trouble yourselves any further; for God will reward your pains with heaven and eternal happiness at last; and as for all earthly things that are fit for you, they shall be added to you over and above; for he that hath provided for you such a glorious, eternal city, will certainly order matters so that you shall want no *viaticum*, no necessary provisions in your journey to it.

And then he concludes all with these words: *Take therefore no thought for the morrow, but let the morrow take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.* Which words contain a fifth argument against all solicitude for future things; and it is to this effect.

Why should you be concerned for to-morrow, or for that which is to come, when that concern is not only fruitless and unprofitable, as has been said, but is extremely uneasy and troublesome, and tends to make your lives really more uncomfortable and grievous than otherwise they would be? God knows, the condition of mankind in this world is always hard enough; there is no man in such prosperous circumstances, but that every day of his life he meets with enough to disturb and discompose him. His cares to get rid of the present encumbrances lie sufficiently heavy upon him; where then is the wisdom of adding new cares about future things to those present ones that every day brings upon him? If therefore you be wise, let every day have its proper care, (and indeed it requires some virtue to be able

to bear that care,) but do not encumber yourselves with the cares of other days that are not yet in being; those will come soon enough without your anticipating them; it is sufficient that you manage the present to the best advantage; but as for what is future, it is time enough to think of struggling with the inconveniences of that when it comes. Why should you torment yourselves before you need? sufficient, abundantly sufficient, for the exercising your patience is the evil and trouble that happens to you every day, and you need not increase it by putting upon your shoulders new loads of that which is to come.

These are our Saviour's reasonings upon this argument; and admirable ones they are. I know nothing like them, nothing comparable to them, to be met with in the most refined writings of the philosophers. I leave them with you, and I pray God they may ever have a due effect both upon you and me.

A SERMON

ON

PHILIPPIANS IV. 6.

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

I HAVE done with the first part of this text, which is a caution against the sin of worldly carefulness, that I despatched the last time.

I now come to the other branch of it, which is a recommendation of the duty of prayer: *In every thing*, saith the apostle, *by prayer and supplication*, &c.

Prayer then, you see, is the argument I have before me; and a very noble argument it is, and withal a very useful one: for prayer is, or ought to be, the continual exercise of our life; for it is to our souls what meat and drink are to our bodies, their repast, their support, their nourishment. Prayer is the great universal instrument by which we fetch down blessings from above, and get ourselves possessed of whatever we want. Prayer is our defence and preservative against sin and against temptation, it is the security of our virtue, and the especial means to advance it.

Prayer is the wing of our souls, whereby we raise up ourselves above this lower world to the God above, and with whom while we therein converse we become more and more transformed into his nature.

Lastly; whatever anticipations of heaven there be here upon earth, whatever foretastes we Christians have in these bodies of the happiness of eternity, they are all brought about by the means of prayer.

Fit therefore and just it is, that what is so great a duty and so great a privilege should be much in our mouths, that it may be more in our hearts, that we should be often called upon and stirred up to the practice of it, and instructed how so to practise it as to obtain effectually all the great and glorious benefits which it is designed by God to derive upon us.

I do not think there is need of spending time in giving an account of the terms of my text, for they are all plain enough. As for the phrase here used, *let your requests be made known unto God*, the word is in the original αἰτήματα, that is, all those things that you have need to ask of God, or to address yourselves to him about; it is the general word to comprehend all kind of things to be prayed for or against.

Well, but are not all these things known to God already? How then should we make them known to him? I answer, Yes certainly; our *heavenly Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him*, as our Saviour hath told us: all therefore that is meant by that expression is, that we are to utter these things, we are to express them or present them to God by the way of prayer and supplication. Well, but what is the sense of these terms, *prayer* and *supplication*, here used? are they the same, or do they mean different things? I answer, In our language we commonly put them for the same thing; in the Greek they are often distinguished, especially when they are joined to-

gether: but then the difference is no more than this, that the word προσευχὴ, which we render *prayer*, doth usually signify such a kind of prayer as is put up for the good things we need; but the word δεήσεις, which we render *supplication*, signifies such a prayer as is put up against the evil things we fear. They both of them come under the name and notion of prayer, but they have their different objects; the one we properly call *petition*, the other *deprecation*: but thus much for the critique on the text.

I now come to my business: *In every thing*, saith the apostle, *by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*

These words may be taken two ways, either as commanding a duty, or as proposing an instrument or means for the obtaining what we desire or stand in need of.

Prayer certainly falls under these two considerations, and we cannot have a true notion of it without taking in both of them; that is to say, without considering it both as it relates to God as due to him, and as it relates to us, as useful for the procuring of what we want. Under both these notions therefore I shall now discourse of prayer: and accordingly these three things I propose to do.

First, I shall discourse of the nature and obligation of prayer, considered as a religious duty we owe to God.

Secondly, I shall discourse of the efficacy and successfulness of prayer considered as an instrument for the procuring blessings to ourselves: and,

Thirdly, I shall discourse of the requisites or conditions of prayer, which we must take care to ob-

serve, if we would have our prayers either acceptable to God, or beneficial to ourselves.

The two first of these heads I shall despatch at this time.

First, I shall begin with prayer, considered as a religious duty.

It may perhaps, at the first hearing, appear strange to some, that prayer should at all be accounted a duty of religion; that is to say, any act of piety towards God, to which mankind should in duty be obliged: for, say they, all acts of religion, in the very nature of them, ought to respect the honour of God; whereas prayer seems only to respect our own benefit, and little, if at all, God's honour: when a beggar asketh an alms at your door, doth he thereby mean to do you any worship or respect, or rather purely to serve his own needs? certainly the latter. It is true, to give thanks for benefits received, (which is one part of prayer, in the large sense of the word,) is an instance of respect and honour done to God; but prayer strictly so called, that is, the putting up requests to God for mercies which we want, seems not to be so, but only to respect ourselves. Thus perhaps it may be said: but those that reason at this rate seem not to have sufficiently considered this matter. Though prayer be put up for the obtaining benefits for ourselves, yet that doth not hinder but that it may be an act of religion properly so called, and an instance of that honour which we are bound to perform to God. And certainly we must think so, if we will ever believe God's own declarations in this matter, or reflect on the nature of prayer itself.

First, as for the holy scriptures, prayer is always

therein accounted an act of God's worship, and strictly enjoined as such to all mankind. In the 50th Psalm, ver. 13, &c. where God is declaring to his people how he will be served; Thinkest thou, says he, that *I will eat bull's flesh, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgivings; and pay thy vows unto the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble.* As therefore he that offereth unto God thanksgivings is in the same Psalm said to honour God, (*he that offereth me thanks, he honoureth me,*) so he that calleth upon God honoureth him also. Nay, so great a part doth prayer make of religion, that the whole of it is sometimes expressed thereby, and *to call upon God, to pray to God,* and *to seek God,* is in the scripture language the same thing as to walk religiously before God; nay, it is sometimes put to express and signify the whole condition that is required of us in order to salvation. Thus, Romans x. 12, 13. *the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.* And on the other side, the character by which wicked men, such as have no sense of piety and religion, are described in scripture is, that they do not practise this duty of prayer, they do not call upon God, as you may see, Psalm liii. 4.

I wish this was seriously taken notice of by those that live in a general neglect and disuse of this point of piety. Whatever other laudable qualities they have to recommend them, yet if they live without praying, without calling upon God, they must be numbered among those that have *no fear of God before their eyes,* but are *workers of wickedness,* as that Psalm expresseth it.

But, in the second place, let us consider the nature of prayer itself. I grant that prayer hath this peculiar to it, that it doth more directly and immediately in its own nature respect our benefit, than any of the other acts of piety and religion strictly so called: but yet, if we will seriously consider it, we shall find that for all this it doth as necessarily respect God, and is as great an instance of his service, as any of the others. For prayer, if we will form true notions of it, is a payment of that homage we owe to God as he is Creator and Governor of the world; it is the owning him to be the sovereign Lord of all his creatures, and that he hath a right to order and dispose of them as he pleaseth: it is the acknowledging our dependance upon his providence for all we have and for all we are; actually professing, to his honour, *that in him we live, move, and have our being*, and *that from him descends every good and perfect gift.* Now surely these are actions that do directly respect God, and are prime instances of that honour and service that we poor creatures are able to pay him, even every whit as much as fear, or love, or thanksgiving is.

There is more in prayer than speaking to God, or representing our desires to him, though that be all that is generally taken notice of in it; that which makes it a virtue, and stamps religion upon it, is, the acknowledgment it makes of our own vileness and impotence, and of God's sovereign power and goodness; and in the dependance it professeth upon him, and him only, for the supply of our wants, and the obtaining whatever good we do desire: in this, I say, consists the very life and soul of prayer; and if we take away this, it has nothing valuable in it; nor

indeed will it find any acceptance with God, or answer from him.

By this account it appears that prayer and thanksgiving do not so much differ as one would imagine; they are both the expressions of our dependance upon God, and making our acknowledgments to him; only the one (that is, thanksgiving) looks backward, and considers the mercies or benefits acknowledged as already given; the other (that is, prayer) looks forward, and considers them as yet not given, but only as desired and expected; that is all the difference.

To make this notion of prayer yet a little plainer, if I can: to every religious prayer that we put up (if we put it up as we should do) there will go these four things:

First of all there is supposed a sense of our wants, and a desire of the supply of them, but withal a conviction of our own impotence and inability to help ourselves.

Secondly, there is supposed a sense of God's presence and providence and goodness, and a belief that God doth see our condition, and knows what we want, and hath also that love and kindness for his creatures, that upon prayer he will supply our necessities, and give us either what we pray for, or what is more convenient for us.

Upon these considerations there follows, in the third place, a looking up to God, a waiting upon him for those blessings we stand in need of; disclaiming all help in ourselves, and entirely depending on his care and kindness for the supply of whatsoever we desire. Now, in the fourth and last place, when we come to form this sense, and those desires, and this

dependance, into direct addresses to God; when we make expression of them by actual application to the throne of his grace, whether in thought alone, or in thought and word too, then is our prayer completed.

This I take to be a true account of this duty of prayer, which, being admitted, we may from hence observe, in the first place, not only that prayer hath an immediate respect to the honour of God, as well as any of the other duties of piety, most properly so called, and consequently is no such mean, selfish business as some profane wits are apt to account it; but also that it is a duty which we do so indispensably owe to God, that we must be horribly injurious to him, as well as to ourselves, if we neglect it: nay, we must first be supposed to be none of his creatures, before we can be excused from it; for is not every creature, in the very nature of creatureship, bound to renounce all self-sufficiency, and to take all opportunities to acknowledge to his Creator the sovereignty he hath over him, and to express his dependance upon him for every thing he hopes for? But what is this but the very essence of prayer, as we have described it? nay, though we had no advantage of our own to be promoted by prayer, as being sure that God would supply all our necessities without our asking him, yet even in this case would prayer be as necessary a duty as it is now, because it would for ever become us to pay our homage to God, and to own him as the Author of all those blessings we expect from him; it will for ever be as reasonable, and as great an instance of piety, to depend upon God for his mercies to come, and to express that dependance by address of prayer to him, as it will be to acknowledge his mercies past, and to express that

acknowledgment by address of thanksgiving to him.

Secondly, from this account we have given of prayer, it appears not only that it is a duty that we owe to God, but that it is a duty we owe to him only; and that no being in the world besides himself hath right thereto.

For if prayer be one of the principal instances of that honour, and an expression of that dependance that we owe to the Creator and Governor of the world, (as we have seen it is,) then certainly to be prayed unto is, and for ever will be, one of his incommunicable peculiarities; one of the rights and prerogatives of his sovereign Majesty, incompatible to any creature. And consequently to invoke, or pray to any creature in a religious way, though it be the highest creature in heaven, whether angel or saint, not excepting the blessed Virgin herself, must needs be an affront done to God, as giving that honour to one of his creatures that is only proper to himself. How the papists will be able to justify their practices in this matter, either to God or the world, I know not; let them look to it. Their ordinary distinctions, I fear, will not bring them off: but I have not time to insist upon this matter.

Having thus considered prayer as a duty, or an act of religion respecting God, I now come to consider it as an instrument or a means that God hath appointed for the obtaining benefits to ourselves; which is the second point I am to speak to.

Here then my business is to treat of the efficacy of prayer; to shew that it is not any vain, unprofitable advice that the apostle here gives us, *by prayer and supplication to make our requests known unto*

God in every thing that we need; but that prayer, whenever it is put up as it ought to be, will be really effectual for the obtaining what we want; that it will be a means to supply us with the good things we desire, or to prevent the evil things we fear, when all our other cares and endeavours will not. For prayer is not breath spent in vain, such as, when it is out of our mouths, mingles for ever with the common air, but it pierceth the clouds, and reacheth the ears of the King of the world, and opens his hand to dispense his blessings upon those his servants that sent it.

This is a point that all of us ought to fix deeply in our hearts, and as firmly to believe it as we believe any thing; that so in all conditions, and upon all occasions, we may be encouraged to have recourse to this expedient of prayer, and may put up our prayers likewise with the greater faith and hope and constancy. I shall therefore, at this time, offer something for the confirmation of your faith in this matter.

I meddle not here with the atheistical crew; a set of men, in this profane age, that endeavours to jeer all devotion out of the world, making the whole business of the returns and answer of prayer, which pious men so much talk of, a mere piece of fancy, the effect of an overheated brain, attributing all the events that come either upon the good or upon the bad, either to chance or necessity, or mechanical powers as blind as that, and saying in the language of those learned persons which Job mentions, chap. xxi. 15. *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we should pray unto him?* With these, I say, I here

meddle not, both because I hope there are no such persons here present, and because it is not now my work to enter upon a point of the first principles of natural and revealed religion; as for instance, the being of a God, his providence over the world, his dispensing rewards or punishments to men according to their good or evil actions, and the truth of the holy scriptures, which are the grounds upon which our belief of the efficacy of prayer is founded.

Those that I now apply myself to are such as own both natural religion and Christianity, as I hope all of you here do. And my design is to endeavour to possess you with as lively a sense as is possible, of God's readiness to hear all your prayers, and to grant all the requests you put up to him, if you go to work heartily and seriously, and with the observation of all those conditions and requisites the holy scripture hath prescribed to you in this matter. I might here largely insist on the general belief and practice of all mankind in all ages, for the proving the point we are now upon. No sort of men that ever owned a God, or professed any religion, but they constantly thought that they received benefit by the sacrifices and prayers they put up to God; and accordingly the main of their religion was always made up of those exercises.

I might likewise largely insist on the many illustrious instances and experiences that good men in all ages have had, and still daily have, of the efficacy of their prayers, testified in such mercies and deliverances, and they so circumstantiated, that there is no room for any doubt that they were owing purely to the goodness of God, that heareth the supplications of his people.

I say, these things might very well be insisted on in this argument; but I rather choose to confine myself to the holy scriptures, as affording matter the most effectual, both for our conviction and encouragement.

And four things we may there take notice of, very pertinent to our purpose:

First, That God hath in the scriptures made the most express promises, that he will hear his people when they pray unto him.

Secondly, He hath in all times most remarkably made good these promises, as appears by many instances and examples.

Thirdly, He hath given other testimonies what mighty force and power the prayers of his servants have with him.

And, fourthly, lest we should think it was all one, whether we prayed or no, he hath declared that our prayer is so necessary in order to the obtaining the good things we stand in need of, that without it we shall not have them. Of these four things very briefly.

First of all, God hath in scripture given such express declarations of his willingness and readiness to hear and answer the prayers that are put up unto him, nay, hath tied up himself by the most solemn promises so to do: *The Lord*, saith the Psalmist, *is nigh unto all them that call upon him in truth. He will fulfil the desires of those that fear him: he also will hear their prayer, and will save them*, Psalm cxlv. 18, 19. *The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers*, Psalm xxxiv. 15. And accordingly one of the attributes that is given to God in scripture is, that

he is a God that heareth prayers, and therefore to him shall all flesh come, Psalm lxv. 2. And accordingly he himself invites every creature so to do, promising deliverance upon their application to him: *Call upon me*, (saith he, in the fiftieth Psalm quoted before,) *call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*

Thus much for the Old Testament; and then, for the New, hear what our Saviour saith to his apostles, John xiv. 13. *Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do;* and again he repeats it, *If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.* But if it should be thought that this promise was made to the apostles only, and doth not concern us, let us hear what St. John writes to all Christians, 1 John iii. 21, 22. *Brethren, if our hearts condemn us not, then we have confidence towards God. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him.* And again, our blessed Saviour in those words of his in the famous sermon upon the mount, which concerns all Christians to the end of the world; *Ask*, saith he, *and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened*, Matth. vii. 7, 8. What promise can be more gracious, more comfortable than this? especially if we take notice how our Saviour enforceth it in the following verses: *What man*, saith he, *is there among you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more will your heavenly*

Father give good things unto them that ask him? As if he had said, If ye who are not always willing to give, but, on the contrary, are often covetous and close-handed, without bowels of pity or affections, yet when your children ask victuals, or other necessaries of you, you are ready to supply them with what they want; can you doubt that God, who is infinite goodness and love and bounty, will be backward to supply you with every good thing, if ye ask it of him? Assure yourselves God hath greater kindness and affection for his creatures, than any parent can have for his children; if, therefore, you would not question the readiness of a parent to give bread to his hungry child when he asketh it of him, much less ought you to call in question the readiness of your heavenly Father to grant whatsoever requests you make unto him, provided the thing you request be good for you.

But, secondly, as the holy scriptures give us many promises and assurances that God will hear our prayers, so they afford us many instances of his making good those promises at all times and to all persons, and that in a most wonderful manner. To mention all the miraculous returns of prayer that are recorded in the book of God would put me upon transcribing too great a part of the scripture; indeed we have no instance there of any good man that ever put up his prayers in vain; but of wonderful amazing things, effected by the prayers of good men, we have instances a multitude.

The prayer of Moses quenched the devouring fire, Numbers xi. 2.

The prayer of Elias brought down fire from heaven, 1 Kings xviii.

The prayer of Elisha restored the dead to life, 2 Kings iv. 33.

The prayer of Hezekiah slew 185,000 of the Assyrians in one night, 2 Kings xix.

The prayer of David stopped the destroying angel, when his hand was lifted up to destroy Jerusalem, 2 Sam. xxiv.

The prayer of Jonah delivered him out of the fish's belly, Jonah ii. 1; to number no more instances.

If it be said, that these examples signify nothing to us, who live in an age where no miracles are to be expected, pray we never so heartily; I answer, they do signify a great deal to us for all that; for we may from such examples draw a good argument to the world's end of the efficacy of the prayers of good men: for if in those days they were so prevailing with God as to move him to leave the usual methods of providence, and to step out into extraordinary actions, nay, even to do violence to the course of nature, that he might answer them, then surely we have reason to believe that God will not be deaf to the prayers that we now put up, which require no such things, but only those blessings which he dispenseth to mankind in the ordinary way of his providence.

But, thirdly, it is worth our while to take notice what a mighty force and virtue the holy scripture attributes to the prayers of good men; this, methinks, is lively set forth to us in the story of the battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites in the seventeenth of Exodus. There we find, that so long as Moses held up his hands in prayer the Israelites prevailed; but when he let them fall, then the

Amalekites had the better; so that in order to the obtaining a complete victory, Moses's hands were held up to the going down of the sun, that is, (as the Chaldee Paraphrase renders it,) *his hands were stretched out in prayer unto the going down of the sun.* Again, when the angel, in the thirty-second of Genesis, with whom Jacob wrestled, (who, indeed, as the ancient fathers do unanimously conclude, was no other than the *Angel of the covenant*, the Son of God, that did *in the fulness of time appear in human flesh,*) I say, this Angel would have been gone from him upon the breaking of the day: No, saith Jacob, *I will not let thee go, unless thou bless me;* and accordingly a blessing he obtained. Earnest prayer doth a kind of violence to God, if we may be allowed so to speak; *as a prince*, saith the Angel there to Jacob, *hast thou power with God and with man, and hast prevailed.*

Again, when God was so grievously displeased at the people of Israel for making the golden calf, saith he to Moses, *Let me alone, that I may destroy this people, and blot out their name from under heaven;* intimating, that if Moses by prayer interceded for them, he would prevent their destruction; and this indeed the event shewed; for notwithstanding what God had before said of his purpose to destroy them, yet upon Moses's prayer he repented of the evil, and was prevailed upon to spare them. Lastly, how prevalent the prayers of good men are with God appears from this, that when God is absolutely resolved not to have mercy upon a people, he expresseth his unalterable purpose to this effect, that though his chiefest favourites, such as Noah, and Daniel, and Job, should intercede with him on be-

half of that people, yet their prayers should do them no good, as you have it four times repeated in the fourteenth chapter of Ezekiel: which is as much as to say, that if any thing in the world could prevail with God to spare that people, it should be the prayers of such men.

But, fourthly and lastly, to conclude;

Let it be further considered, for the shewing the efficacy of prayer, that the scriptures have declared it so necessary in order to the obtaining the good things we stand in need of, that if we do not pray for them we shall not have them.

This is sufficiently evident from that passage in St. James, chap. iv. ver. 2. *Ye lust,* saith he, *and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, and yet ye have not;* and why so? *because,* saith he, *ye ask not.* That is to say, all your coveting and envying, and fighting and contending, bring you in no kind of profit; you are never a whit, by these means, the nearer the obtaining what you desire; and the reason is, because praying to God, which is the chiefest means of obtaining, is not practised by you.

All these things considered, I think every man in the world, that hath any sense of religion, must needs be convinced that serious and solemn prayer is not only of great use, but of absolute necessity for the obtaining what we want; that there is no prospering in our affairs without it; and when it is put up devoutly and heartily, and in that manner it ought to be, it never fails to bring down the blessing of Heaven upon us.

I should now proceed to the third head proposed to discourse of, and that is, of the requisites or condi-

tions of prayer, that we must take care to observe, if we would have our prayers either acceptable to God or beneficial to ourselves; but this I shall reserve for another time. Now to God, &c.

A SERMON

ON

MATTHEW VII. 7.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

THIS text is a part of our Saviour's famous sermon on the mount, which may be justly called a summary of all Christian duties. In these words he is treating of the great Christian instrument of obtaining from God whatever we stand in need of, and that is, hearty prayer to him. He had delivered to his disciples, in the former chapter, a form of prayer for them to use, and now he comes to recommend and enforce the constant practice of that duty, by giving them assurance, that if they did practise it, they should not fail of having their requests granted, and being supplied with every thing they stood in need of.

A great and unspeakable comfort this is, to be able at all times certainly to say, Whatever is fit for me, it shall be given me, if I do but ask it, if I do but seek it, if I do but knock at the gate of mercy for it. And yet this every Christian may say, if our Saviour's affirmation may be relied on; for words cannot be contrived to express more plainly or more strongly the constant, never-failing efficacy of hearty prayer, than these are which our Saviour here delivers; *Ask*, saith he, *and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you:* which promise of his, for the further pos-

sessing our minds with a steadfast belief of it, he repeats again in the next verse by way of an universal proposition; *For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened:* and the more to enforce this, he doth in the next words put the case of an ordinary father, who, though he may be supposed to be otherwise a churlish or unkind sort of man, yet, if his son when he is an hungry should ask bread of him, he could not be thought so hard-hearted as to give him a stone for bread, or a serpent for a fish; *If, therefore,* as our Saviour infers, *we that are evil know how to give good gifts unto our children when they ask us, how much more will our heavenly Father,* (who has nothing of evil or churlishness in his nature, but is perfect love and goodness itself,) *how much more shall he give good gifts unto them that ask him?*

But then, though all this be so, though God hath by his Son Jesus made this plain promise, that *every one that asketh shall receive,* and though we may be as certain as we are of any thing that God will to all Christians always make good this promise, yet we cannot imagine that every thing that any of us ask shall be granted to us; for we may ask foolish, unreasonable things: neither can we imagine that every kind of asking will prevail with God to hear us; for we may ask in such a manner that our petitions shall rather be affronts than prayers, and so may justly merit indignation and contempt rather than acceptance: so that before we can apply this promise to ourselves, or expect that God should make it good to us, it is absolutely necessary that we should rightly understand it; that is, know both what we

are to ask, and how we are to ask, if we hope to receive the comfortable effects of our Saviour's words.

And indeed this is the only material point to be discoursed of from this text; that God will, on his part, always perform what our Saviour hath given his word for, I hope nobody among us doubteth, and therefore it is needless to insist on the truth of that. All that is to be done is, to shew what and how we may so ask, so seek, so knock, as that we may receive what we ask, find what we seek, and obtain admittance upon our knocking.

My business then, at this time, is to give an account of the requisites or conditions of prayer, which we are to take care to observe, if we expect to have our prayers answered.

Now these requisites or conditions of prayer are, as I just now intimated, either such as concern the matter of our prayers, or the things we are to pray for; or, secondly, such as concern the manner of our prayer, or the qualifications with which they are to be accompanied: both these therefore must be here considered.

I begin with the first, the matter of our prayers, or the things which we are to ask at God's hands.

Now here the general proposition is, that the things which we ask of God (if we mean he should answer our prayers) must be such as are agreeable to his will. This is the rule laid down by the apostle in the First Epistle of St. John, chap. v. ver. 14. *This,* saith he, *is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us:* and most certainly if we do not ask according to his will, he will not hear us. Well, but how shall we know what things are agreeable to God's

will, and what are not, that so we may know what things we are to pray for? In answer to this inquiry, I lay down these four propositions.

First of all, it is certain that whatsoever is not just is not agreeable to the will of God, and consequently ought not to be prayed for; as, for instance, to pray for revenge upon our enemies, to desire God to prosper us in our wicked courses, and the like: in these cases the matter of our prayer is unlawful in itself; and consequently to put up such prayers to God must needs be an affront to the divine Majesty, because it is to suppose him inclined to abet and patronise our impious desires and designs.

But, secondly, several things may be very just in themselves, but yet it will be very unjust in us to ask them; as, for instance, when we ask good things but to evil purposes: now here also our prayers must needs be disagreeable to the will of God: *Ye ask,* saith St. James, *and receive not, because ye ask amiss;* and why so? *ye ask that ye may consume it upon your lusts.* I wish we all did seriously examine our own hearts as to this point, when we put up such earnest prayers to God for this or the other worldly thing that we have set our hearts about. As for wealth, or learning, or success in this or the other project we have in hand; have we not at the bottom some secret ends of pride and vainglory, or covetousness, or luxury to be served hereby, if God should grant our request? If we have, in vain it is to put up our prayers to God, or if he do hear them, it will be in anger, and by way of punishment to us.

But, thirdly, the matter of our prayers may be lawful in itself, and we may ask with honest and innocent designs, and yet the things we ask may

not be according to the will of God: the reason is, because God perhaps sees they are not convenient for us, or he sees that some other things will better befit our circumstances. And truly this is the case of all that sort of things which we call *worldly blessings:* we cannot tell when they are good for us, or whether it be not better for us to be without them; and therefore we cannot tell whether it be agreeable to God's will that we should have them or no; and consequently we cannot, with assurance of success, pray for them. We cannot, for instance, positively and absolutely put up such a prayer as this: Lord, remove this sickness from me; Lord, grant me a long life; Lord, let me have children, and the like. To desire these things absolutely is to desire something that, for any thing we know, may be evil to us, or at least will not be so great a good as the being without it; and therefore we may be sure God, if he loves us, will not grant it. Thus it fared with St. Paul, in the twelfth of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, who upon his being apt *to be exalted above measure for the abundance of the revelations that were vouchsafed to him, there was given him,* as he tells us, *a thorn in the flesh,* that *the messenger of Satan might buffet him;* that is, in all probability, he had some great infirmity of body inflicted on him, which would sufficiently abate the tumour of his mind, because it did expose him and his preaching to the contempt of the false teachers, whom he elsewhere calls *the ministers of Satan.* Well now, upon this he tells us that he prayed thrice unto God that it might *depart from him.* What now was God's answer? No other than this; *My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weak-*

ness: that is to say, It is enough for thee that this is sent to thee for thy good, and that I support thee under it; as for the removal of it, it is not so convenient, because my strength and power, that goes along with thee in thy preaching, is the more illustriously shewed in this thy weakness.

But what then, are we not to pray against any particular temporal evils that we lie under, or for any particular temporal blessing that we want? I answer, Yes, certainly, we not only may, but in some cases ought: but then we are always to do it with submission to the divine will; we may put up our requests for any lawful thing, but then it must constantly be with this condition, if God sees it fit for us, if it be agreeable to his will; so long as we pray for outward conveniences with that reserve or limitation, our prayers are allowable enough, and will, without doubt, (if all the other requisites be there,) find a gracious answer from God; that is to say, he will either give us in kind what we pray for, or something that is better for us.

Our Saviour hath given us a most remarkable example both of this kind of prayer and of this kind of answer. Three times in his agony did he fall down before God, and in the most earnest manner that could be, *with strong cries and groans,* as St. Paul in the Hebrews expresseth it, *prayed, that that cup might pass from him,* (that is, that painful ignominious death that was then approaching:) *nevertheless,* saith he, *not as I will, but as thou wilt.* What answer now had he of this earnest prayer? Why, St. Paul tells us, Heb. v. 7. that he *was heard in that he feared;* or, as the expression may be better rendered, *he was so heard as to be delivered from his*

fear; not from suffering death, but from the fear of it; for an angel from heaven was sent to strengthen him, as St. Luke tells us. God granted his request, not in kind, but by giving that which was much better for him.

But it may be said, are there no particulars then that we can ask of God absolutely, and with assurance that they shall be granted? I answer, in the fourth place, we may peremptorily ask all spiritual blessings in particular, and be assured, if the other requisites of our prayer do concur, we shall obtain them. There is this difference between spiritual blessings and temporal; we are not certain, as I said, whether the temporal things that appear most desirable will be real blessings to us or no, and therefore we cannot positively ask them of God. All that we can do as to these things is heartily to recommend ourselves and our circumstances to God's wisdom and goodness, desiring him to give us what he sees most prosperous or most convenient for us; and as for this or the other particular thing we think we need, if we do mention it in our prayer, it must be with entire submission to God, whether he will grant it us or no.

But now spiritual things, such as the pardon of our sins, and all kinds of virtue, and graces of the Holy Spirit, and the like, these are always blessings; blessings to us and to the world, and we can receive no hurt from them; and therefore we may confidently and absolutely ask them of God, and we may be earnest and importunate with him for them, and take no denial at his hands; all along supposing that we ask them upon no other terms than upon what he hath promised them.

The sum of this whole point concerning the matter of our prayers is this: we must not pray for unlawful things; we must not pray for lawful things with a design to put them to an ill use, to make provision with them *for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof;* we must not pray for any particular worldly thing, but with absolute resignation of ourselves and our wills to God's will; so that the chief matter of our prayers, or the things that we are importunately to ask of God, will be temporal mercies in general, and spiritual mercies both in general and particular: I say, the temporal mercies in general; that is to say, we are to pray for the peace and happiness of the whole world, and more especially of the church and kingdom unto which we belong; and as for our own private concernments, we are most heartily to recommend ourselves and all our affairs to the mercy and to the protection of God, desiring him to take care of us, and to dispose us into such outward circumstances as will most tend to his glory and the good of the public, and the advantage of our own souls. He knows what is best for us, and therefore to him we offer ourselves; we beg of him to give us all good things, and to keep us from all evil things, (which was Socrates's prayer;) but as to what things are good or evil for us, we leave it to his wisdom to determine.

But then for spiritual mercies we are to be a great deal more particular. We are not only to pray for the pardon of our sins, and the grace of God's holy Spirit, and eternal life in general, but we are to consider all our particular infirmities and wants and necessities, and to beg God's favour in the one, and supply of the other. We are to men-

tion to God all our particular sins, as we happen to fall into them, and to implore his mercy and forgiveness: we are to mention to him all our particular weaknesses of nature, and the temptations we are exposed to, and to beg his grace to overcome them. We are daily to pray to him to carry on the good work he hath begun in us; to strengthen and confirm our purposes and resolutions to serve him; to enable us to give up ourselves with more cheerfulness and sincerity to him; to help us to watch over our thoughts and words and actions, that we be not drawn into any sin; to increase every day our faith in Christ, our hope and trust in him, our dependance upon him, and our love to him; to make us more meek, and more humble, and more temperate, and more charitable; to give us a greater and more lively sense of his presence, and his goodness, and his infinite love to us, that we may make more pure returns of love and thankfulness, and be more forward to every good work. In a word, whatsoever is matter of our duty, that ought most especially to be the matter of our prayers; and whatever we pray for of that kind, God will always grant it us, if we be not wanting to ourselves; and not only so, but, together with those things, which are the greatest blessings he can bestow, he will, upon our general prayer, give us every other thing that we stand in need of; for our Saviour will never fail to make good his promise, *Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all other things shall be added unto you.* And thus much let it suffice to have spoken of the first point requisite to our effectual asking any thing of God; name-

ly, that the matter of our prayers be good, and such as is agreeable to the will of God.

I now come to my second general head; namely, in what manner we are to ask of God, if we mean that our prayers should be effectual.

Now as to this, several things the holy scriptures require of us, which it will highly concern us to observe, if we would put up our prayers so as that they may be acceptable to God.

I cannot make a better distribution of them than into these two heads:

I. First, The things that are necessary for the preparing or disposing us to pray as we should do.

II. Secondly, The things that must accompany our prayers, if we would have them effectual.

I. The first sort of things I call preparatives to prayer, and they are these three:

1. First, that we purge our hearts from all actual affection to sin.

2. Secondly, that we have fit and becoming apprehensions of ourselves and our own condition.

3. Thirdly, that we have fit and becoming apprehensions of God.

II. The second sort of things which must accompany our prayers, as they are set forth in the scriptures, are these four:

1. First, that our prayers be fervent and constant.

2. Secondly, that we pray in faith.

3. Thirdly, that we put up our prayers in the name of the Lord Jesus.

4. Fourthly, that to our prayers for any thing, we add our own endeavours to obtain it.

I shall, at this time, confine myself to the first of

these heads, namely, what concerns our preparations for prayer, or the qualities and dispositions we must possess ourselves of, in order to the putting up acceptable prayers to God, referring the prosecution of the latter head to some other opportunity.

Now the first thing required of us for the preparing and disposing us for the putting up our prayers as we should do, is, that we purify our hearts from all actual affection to sin; that we come not to God with any of our wickedness about us, but that we do, at least in purpose and desire, put them away from us: this is so absolutely necessary, that there is no praying without it. *If I incline unto wickedness with my heart,* saith David, *the Lord will not hear me. We know,* saith the man in the gospel, *that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a doer of his will, he will hear him.* Nay, God doth not only not hear sinners, but their prayers are an abomination to him: *The sacrifices of the wicked,* saith Solomon, *are an abomination to the Lord.* But what then, are not wicked men to pray? Yes, certainly, how else shall they ever come to be good? But they must leave off their wickedness; or, if that cannot be done at once, or in a moment, they must at least sincerely purpose and resolve against it, and then put up their prayers to God. If they do not do this, they affront God instead of praying to him, they defy him, and put a mockery upon him. For is it not a plain mockery, is it not a defiance of his justice and holiness, to come and to pretend seriously to beg pardon for my adultery, or my drunkenness, or the like, and to implore the grace of the Holy Spirit to forsake these sins, when yet at the same time I know in my own

heart that I mean, the next opportunity or occasion that offers itself, to commit them over again? Till therefore we can seriously resolve to quit our evil courses, to forsake every known, wilful, open sin, that we are conscious to ourselves we live in, let us not think ourselves prepared and qualified to put up our prayers to God. That is the first thing.

Secondly, another thing required in order to the disposing of us for prayer is, that we have fit and just apprehensions of ourselves and our own condition. Now this consists of two things; first, in getting our hearts deeply affected with a sense of our wants; and secondly, with a sense of our own meanness and unworthiness. First of all, we must endeavour to get our minds seriously affected with a sense of our manifold wants and necessities. If we be not heartily sensible of what we want, it is impossible we should heartily pray for redress and supply; and without such earnest prayer, as I shall shew hereafter, we are not to expect that God will hear us. We are then fit and prepared to pray as we should do, when we have the same real feeling of our spiritual needs that a hungry stomach has of the need of meat and drink. Thus, without doubt, was the devout Psalmist affected; *As the hart*, saith he, *panteth after the brooks of water, so longeth my soul after thee, O God. My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God*, Psal. xlii. 1, 2. Would we therefore bring ourselves to a praying temper, let us often take an account of the state of our souls, and examine what wants we have to be supplied, what sins to be pardoned, what evil affections to be mortified, what virtues and graces of the Holy Spirit to be attained. And when we have

done this, let us make it our business to impress the most lively sense of these things upon our souls that is possible: to which purpose let us often represent to them, that it is no trifling employment we go about, when we make our addresses at the throne of grace, but an affair of the last importance to us; our work there is to get strength and power against our corruptions, to obtain deliverance from the wrath of God due to our sins, and to get our natures transformed into the image of God by *righteousness and true holiness.* We are undone for ever, if we fail in any of these things; we cannot live without them; we need them more a great deal than the air we breathe in; sure therefore it will concern us to be in good earnest. Let us think with ourselves, was I now a slave amongst the infidels, and had for some years endured the misery of that condition, should I not be deeply sensible of my chains? should I not groan after a redemption? should I not pray with the utmost earnestness, if I had any hopes that my prayers would work my deliverance? Why, under as hard a bondage I am, if I seriously consider it, so long as I live under the power and dominion of any sin; nay, and a far harder; for death will put an end to the misery of my bodily captivity, whereas it will only be the beginning of the sorrows and miseries of my spiritual.

Can I then be insensible of my danger? Can I be cold and indifferent, when I am to beg of Heaven so great a blessing as to be rescued from the bondage of the Devil *into the glorious liberty of the sons of God!* O my soul, think of these things; think of thy pressing necessities: remember thou art undone, if God do not take pity on thee; and how dost thou

think he should pity, if thou dost not pity thyself? Let us never leave our souls, till, by these and such other considerations, we have wrought them to a hearty feeling of their own needs, and to most vehement desires of having them supplied; which is one great step towards a praying temper.

But, secondly, as we must get our hearts affected with a sense of our wants, so must we also with a sense of our own meanness and unworthiness. Of all kinds of men the proud, and those that are full of themselves, are the most unfit for prayer, and the most offensive to God when they make addresses to him. He *resisteth them*, he *beholdeth them afar off*, as the scripture expresseth it; that is, with an eye of scorn: but the humble *he giveth grace to; the broken and the contrite heart he will never despise*. Accordingly we find that all the men that have been dearest to God, and most powerful in their prayers, have been of this temper. Abraham, who was styled *the friend of God*, and from whom God would hide none of his counsels, yet when he approacheth to his Maker, thinks himself no better than dust and ashes: *Behold*, saith he, *I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, who am but dust and ashes*. David styles himself *a worm, and no man*. Job, who was one of the powerful intercessors with God that Ezekiel speaks of, his way of speaking to God is, *Behold I am vile, what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth; I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes*.

But that which doth most remarkably shew the necessity of this humble temper, this mean sense of ourselves when we approach to God, is the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican that went into the

temple to pray; which our Saviour delivers in the eighteenth of St. Luke: *The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself; God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.* Thus far the Pharisee; and without doubt he said nothing but what was true. *But the Publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner.* What now was the effect of these prayers? *Verily,* saith our Saviour, *this man went down to his house justified rather than the other.* This man, this Publican, who was a great sinner, yet coming with humility and contrition, with a hearty sense of his own vileness, and a great shame for having offended God, this man was justified; his prayer was accepted, and he himself acquitted: whereas the other, the Pharisee, who was no scandalous sinner, but framed his outward conversation according to the precepts of the law, yet because he thought too highly of himself, was not sensible of his defects, but took a vain complacency in the goodness of his own performances, and despised others; this man and his prayer were rejected. And so shall it ever fare with men of that temper; for, as our Saviour concludes the parable, *every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.* But then we must take care that we be not abused with false shows of humility: this humility and sense of our unworthiness, that I speak of, doth not consist in bitter declamations against ourselves, and presenting unto God, by way of confession, long catalogues of

such sins as it is to be hoped we were never guilty of; no, there may lie great pride and vanity under this veil of modesty. The temper of the Publican, which our Saviour recommends to us, is another kind of thing; it is more quiet and still, it hath more sense, but less noise and boisterousness: it is a prostration of our souls before God in the most feeling apprehensions of our own nothingness: it represents us to ourselves neither better nor worse, but just as we are, that is to say, the creatures of God, that had been nothing without him, that are now nothing of ourselves, but all that we are or have is from him, and so must all that we hope for be: so that we have no kind of thing in the world but our sins and follies that we can call our own; and those, God knows, are so far from affording matter of boasting to us, that they ought to fill us with shame and confusion. So far are they from entitling us to the favour of God, or any blessing from him, that we look upon them as instances of great ingratitude for those he hath already vouchsafed, and which render us utterly unworthy of his mercies for the time to come. Upon a lively sense and apprehension of these things, we absolutely quit ourselves; we renounce all creature-dependencies, we throw ourselves at the footstool of the great God, confessing our meanness, ashamed of our follies, bewailing our unthankfulness, acknowledging our inability to help ourselves, and professing to rely on God, and God only, for every thing we expect, or desire, or hope for.

And thus much of the second requisite to a due preparation and disposition of mind for prayer.

I proceed to the third and last, and that is, the possessing our minds with worthy and becoming ap-

prehensions of God: now this likewise consists in two things especially:

First, In having a lively sense of God's greatness and majesty.

Secondly, A full and hearty belief of his goodness. Of these two things briefly, and I have done.

First, in order to the further preparing and disposing our minds for prayer, we must labour to possess our hearts with a deep sense of God's infinite and incomprehensible majesty. Would we be in a temper and disposition to pray as we should do; let it be deeply impressed upon our minds, who it is that we pray to; even no other than the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, that was from everlasting and is to everlasting. It is he that by his breath made us and every thing that is; and by the same breath of his mouth can sink us and the world into its first nothing. It is he, in comparison of whom all nations are not so much as a drop of the bucket to the ocean, or a dust of the balance to the whole earth, before whom ten thousand times ten thousand glorious angels do daily minister. It is he that hath all perfections in himself and of himself, being infinite in knowledge and wisdom and power, and all other excellencies. He that is present to us and to all the world at the same time, *being about our beds, and about our paths, and understanding all our ways, so that there is not a thought in our hearts, nor a word in our tongues, but he knoweth it altogether.* Lastly, it is he that is all holiness and purity, all perfect light, and in him *there is no darkness at all,* nor can he behold the least iniquity with approbation. These conceptions, these apprehensions we are to have of God, if we would put ourselves into a

temper fit to approach him; and not only to have them in our understandings, but to impress them most powerfully upon our hearts; to get a lasting sense of them upon our spirits, that so at all times, when we come before God, we may behave ourselves to him as becomes us; and certainly, if we were thus affected with the excellencies of his Majesty, we should so behave ourselves: we should prostrate ourselves before him in the lowest humility of our souls and bodies: we should be careful of our thoughts when we speak to him, that they did not wander from him, and spend themselves vainly and unprofitably when they should be fixed upon him. We should be careful of our words, that they were never rude and unseemly, but such as became such poor creatures to so great a King. In a word, we should take care to perform all our offices of worship to him with the greatest fear and reverence, with seriousness and attention, with modesty and zeal, with the least straying of thought or discomposedness of mind that the infirmities of our nature will allow of.

But, secondly, among all the rest of God's excellencies and perfections, we ought more particularly, in order to the praying as we should do, to get our hearts possessed with a sense of his goodness. This is that, which above all other things, will put life and vigour into our prayers, will both stir us up to this duty, and support us in the performance of it: *He that cometh to God*, saith St. Paul, *must believe that he is, and that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* Whoever is fully persuaded of this, will affectionately seek God, and will find the greatest comfort in the world in so doing; but he

that is without this sense of the love and kindness of God will but move heavily in his devotions, all his services will be coldly and languidly performed, because they are in a manner forced, they sprang not from love and hope, but from fear and awe.

Let us therefore take care to represent God to ourselves, the most kind, and loving, and benign Being that is conceivable. Let us be persuaded heartily that he loves us, and takes care of us; that he pities our infirmities, and hath a sense of our wants, and is as ready to relieve us, and to give us whatsoever we stand in need of, as we can be to ask him. Certainly we have all the reason in the world to believe this: the notions we have of his nature do lay the grounds for such a belief; the revelations he hath made of himself in his word do confirm it; and all his dealings with mankind, from the beginning of the world to this day, are but so many experiences that we have of the truth of it. Can he that made us at first, and that still preserves us, renewing his mercies and compassion upon us every moment; (nay, there is not a minute of our lives wherein we are not indebted to him for a thousand benefits;) can such a Being be harsh, or severe, or penurious to his creatures? can he be forgetful of them, or want bowels of pity, when they cry to him? He that sent his own Son to die for us, *shall he not with him freely give us all things?* He that gave us the greatest blessings, shall he not give us less ones? as the apostle argues. No, let us assure ourselves, *no father doth in that degree pity his children, as the Lord is merciful to them that fear him;* so the Psalmist tells us: nay, a heathen poet could say, That man is more dear to God than he is to himself:

and if we do not feel more effects of his love, (though those that we do feel are not to be named,) it is because we will not open our hearts or our hands to receive them. The communications of God are as ready at hand as the air we breathe in, and they press into all rightly-disposed souls: but those souls that are narrow and sensual, that grovel upon the earth, and will not cast up their eyes, though it were to make a purchase of the stars, it is no wonder that those men continue in darkness, and partake but little of the light of God's countenance; since *they love darkness better than light*, they value the gratification of a sensual brutish appetite before the possession of the greatest good in the world.

Thus have I given you an account of those general qualifications or dispositions that are requisite in a man to make him fit for prayer: and this, I believe, I may say, that whosoever will take care to get his mind into such a frame as I have been now representing, it will be very easy to him to perform all such other particular conditions required in the scriptures to make his prayers acceptable, and which yet remain to be spoken to: that is to say, he will hereby be the better enabled to pray fervently and constantly, he will be in a better disposition to ask in faith; he will the more easily see the necessity of putting up prayers in the name and for the merits of our Lord Jesus. He will be the more inclined to be in charity with all the world, when he comes to beg mercies for himself; and, lastly, he will hereby be convinced how necessary it is, that to his prayers for good things he should also add his own endeavours for the obtaining of them: but another time must be taken for that.

A SERMON

ON

MATTHEW VII. 7.

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.

THE last time I preached upon this text, my design was to give an account of the requisites or conditions which we are to observe in our prayers, if we expect to have this promise of our Lord's in the text made good to us; that is to say, how we are to *ask*, and *seek*, and *knock*, in order to the receiving what we ask, finding what we seek, and obtaining admittance upon our knocking.

Now these conditions or requisites of prayer are either such as concern the matter of our prayers, or the things we are to pray for; or, secondly, such as concern the manner of our prayers, or the qualifications with which we are to put them up.

The first of these I have already largely discoursed of; and what I said upon this head may be reduced to these four propositions:

First, Whatever is not just or lawful in itself ought not to be the matter of our prayers; for to ask such things is really to affront God Almighty.

Secondly, Several things may be very just in themselves, and yet it will be very unjust in us to ask them; as, for instance, when we ask either things that we need not, or ask them to evil purposes, for the making for the flesh *to fulfil the lusts thereof.*

Thirdly, Even such things as we think we have need of, and which we may very lawfully pray for, yet if they be things of a temporal nature, we cannot ask them absolutely and peremptorily of God, but only with this condition, if God sees them fit for us; for all temporal blessings we must put up our prayers with such perfect submission to God, as to say from our hearts with our Saviour, *Not my will, O Lord, but thine be done.* And the reason is, because we are at no time certain, whether any of those outward things we desire are really good for us: they may prove either real evils to us, or there may be something which is much better for us, for which reason it is very unfit we should be our own carvers, but refer ourselves entirely to God, who alone knows what our true interests are.

And therefore, fourthly and lastly, there remains but one kind of thing which we can positively, and with assurance of success, pray to God for; and these are all spiritual blessings; all the things that concern either our living a holy life here, or a happy, eternal life hereafter; these we may peremptorily ask of God, and depend upon him that he will grant them, provided we ask as we should do; for these can never be hurtful either to us or to the world, and therefore will alway be agreeable to the will of God.

In the second place, as for the requisites that concern the manner of our prayers, or the qualifications with which we are to put them up, I distributed them into these two heads:

First, those that are necessary for the preparing or disposing us to pray as we should do. Secondly, those that must accompany our prayers, if we would

have them effectual. The first sort of things I call preparatives to prayer; and those I likewise treated of in the former Sermon, and therefore I shall now only name them. In order to a due preparation for prayer, or the getting ourselves into a devout praying temper, there are these five things required: first, that we purge our hearts of all actual affections to sin; that we come not to God with any of our wickednesses about us, but that we do, at least in purpose and design, put them away from us.

Secondly, that we endeavour to get our hearts deeply affected with a sense of our manifold wants and necessities.

Thirdly, that we get our hearts affected with a lively sense of our own vileness and unworthiness, upon account of our manifold sins and transgressions.

Fourthly, that we be duly sensible of the infinite greatness and majesty of that God to whom we do approach in our prayers, that so we may make our applications with that decency, and seriousness, and attention, and fear, and reverence, that become such poor creatures to so glorious a Majesty.

Fifthly, that we endeavour to possess our minds with a firm belief and feeling apprehension of God's infinite goodness, really looking upon him to be what he is, a most kind, indulgent, compassionate Father to all his creatures, that he is as ready to give us whatever we want, as we can possibly be to ask it.

And thus much of preparation for prayer: I come now, in the second place, to treat of those other things that must accompany our prayers, and which it will concern us to observe, if we would

have our prayers acceptable; and they are likewise five:

First, that our prayers be fervent and constant.

Secondly, that we pray in faith.

Thirdly, that we pray in charity.

Fourthly, that we put up our prayers in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fifthly, that to our prayers for any thing we add our own endeavours. And these I design for the heads of my following Discourse.

The first condition that must accompany our prayers for the rendering them effectual is, great fervour and constancy; that is, that we do in the most hearty, serious, and affectionate manner, put up our requests to God; and likewise that we persevere in so doing. Both these things are necessary; for whatsoever prayers we put up with coldness and indifferency, in such a careless, languid way, as if we mattered not whether we were heard or no, we can never expect they should be effectual, though we approach to the throne of grace never so often. And on the other side, be we never so earnest, yet if it be but for once or twice, or by fits and starts, as we are in an humour; if we let our suit fall, if we do not continue and persevere in it, there is little likelihood we shall attain what we pray for. We must join both together, great fervency and intenseness of mind, and great constancy and perseverance: and this is the full importance of our Saviour's command in the 18th of St. Luke, *That men ought always to pray, and not to faint.* This is that which is meant by *seeking* and *knocking* in my text; we must not only *ask*, but we must *seek*, we must *knock;* in each of which expressions the latter still imports

some further degree of earnestness and application of mind, than was implied in the former. Surely this is that which the apostle speaks of in that advice of his, *of continuing instant in prayer*, Rom. xii. 12. of *praying always with all prayer and supplication, and watching thereunto with all perseverance*, Eph. vi. 18.

But of all other passages of scripture, the necessity and efficacy of this importunity in prayer that we speak of, is most lively set forth to us by our blessed Saviour in that remarkable parable of his in the eleventh of St. Luke's Gospel; *Which of you*, saith he, *shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and shall say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine in his journey is come unto me, and I have nothing to set before him? And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: for the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth.* And then follows the application of the parable, in the same words as are in my text; *Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

It is true, we cannot from this parable draw this conclusion, that God is like the man here spoken of, that he wants kindness to his friends, and that if he doth grant their requests, it is not so much out of love, as that he may be freed from the trouble of their importunities: this is decent enough to be said of a man, and therefore our Saviour so puts the pa-

rable: but it cannot be applied to an infinitely wise and good God, who never can be disturbed by others, nor is he put to any disturbance or trouble, in order to the conferring his benefits. But thus much certainly the very frame of the parable leads us to conclude; that many things that God will not give us without our prayers, he will give us, if we pray to him for them. And those things that God will not grant upon our slight and lazy prayers, he will grant if we be earnest and importunate and constant in them: so that it concerns every person, if he would obtain what he prays for, to take this course, both to pray fervently, and to continue in so doing. For instance, do you find that you do not make such advances in virtue and goodness as you desire; but, notwithstanding your good resolutions, you are under the power of many corruptions, which your nature or your former customs do strongly incline you to? You think now that prayer to God for his grace to assist and strengthen you is a good remedy in this case; and so certainly it is; but you are mistaken, if you think that praying once or twice, though it be very heartily, will do the business. Nor are you to conclude, that because you do not on a sudden find that strength or assistance which you expected when you prayed for it, that therefore God hath no kindness for you, or that he will not answer your prayers. Much less are you to reason thus with yourself: God knows that I want the assistance of his Spirit to overcome my vicious affections, and he knows that I heartily desire it, and he knows that I have more than once prayed for it, and therefore to what purpose should I be further troublesome to him with my prayers? No, this is never the

way to obtain what we desire; let us rather redouble our devotions; let us rather continue to knock more earnestly and more importunately at the gate of mercy for the supply of our wants. If we use this method, if we thus, with zeal and diligence and patience, keep waiting upon God, there is no manner of doubt but that he will at last fulfil the desires of our souls, and give us such a measure of his grace and Spirit as shall enable us to conquer all difficulties, to overcome all temptations, and to vanquish every lust, every corruption that can make head against us.

Some perhaps may be apt to wonder why God should require this importunity we speak of as a condition of his answering our prayers; why he should not as well grant our requests at the first time of our putting them up, if we put them up seriously and heartily, as after many repetitions of them. But the answer is easy: for the same reason that God requires us to pray at all, in order to the obtaining his benefits, for the same reason it is necessary we should pray with fervency and constancy; his goodness is such that he would supply us with every thing we stand in need of without praying, were it not that praying is good for us; that he sees we receive many advantages thereby, besides the obtaining the direct blessing we pray for; and therefore it is that he hath so indispensably ordered it. We do not pray to inform God of our wants, or to persuade him by our arguments to supply them: but God hath therefore obliged us to pray, because it is eternally reasonable, and makes much to the improving in us all those qualities in which the perfection of our natures doth consist, that we should

continually depend upon him for every good thing we need; of which dependance prayer is the proper expression.

Indeed, if we considered well, we should find the benefits that come to us by prayer (without taking the granting or answering of our prayers into the consideration) are inestimable. Prayer raiseth up our souls above this world, and makes them capable of the communications and impressions of the divine nature. It is the most natural means in the world to allay all troublesome passions, to revive and strengthen all good purposes and resolutions, to fill the mind with joy and peace and consolation, in all circumstances and conditions of life. Lastly, it is the best exercise of all those virtues and graces that we have, as well as it is the proper means and instrument for the getting those we have not.

Since now all these good ends are served by prayer, all these benefits are attained by it, it cannot be thought unreasonable that God should require that this prayer should be fervent and constant. Nay, if God had not required it, reason must tell us that it ought to be so, since all the aforesaid ends will thereby be the better served; all the aforesaid benefits will be thereby obtained in a greater degree and proportion.

But I proceed to the second condition which God requires in our prayers, in order to their being effectual, and that is, that we ask in faith.

This is a condition ordered by our Saviour to his apostles, in St. Matthew xxi. 22. *All things*, saith he, *whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive.* And thus also St. James speaks to all Christians, in the first chapter of his Epistle, and the

5th and 6th verses; *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.* The question here is, what it is *to ask believing*, or *to ask in faith*. Is it to ask with a full persuasion and assurance that that which I pray for shall certainly be granted me? No, certainly; a great many may ask in faith that have not this full assurance or persuasion. I must own indeed that to pray in faith doth sometimes, in the New Testament, signify to pray with a confidence that what is prayed for will be granted; and I cannot deny but that the words of our Saviour I now quoted, in their primary sense, and as they were spoken to the apostles, had a respect to such a faith as this; for he spoke them upon occasion of the sudden withering away of the fig tree, which he had cursed the day before: at which when the apostles much marvelled, our Saviour saith to them, *If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say to this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive.* No doubt our Saviour here speaks of praying with such a faith as implied a full persuasion and assurance that they could do any extraordinary thing, work any miracle for the confirmation of the truth of the gospel: and such a faith God did in those times inspire the apostles with, and others the first planters of the gospel:

and it is of such a faith that St. Paul speaks, when he says, *If I had all faith, so that I could remove mountains.* But then we are to remember that this sort of faith was one of the miraculous gifts which were conferred upon the apostles, and was peculiar to their times, and was altogether as extraordinary as the gift of tongues was; so that we of this age have nothing to do with it. *Praying in faith*, as it concerns us, is quite another thing, and can imply no more than one of these two things:

First, the praying with a hearty belief both that God is able to grant the requests I put up to him, and that, for the sake of Jesus Christ, he will do it, supposing that it will be for his glory and my good; and also supposing that I perform all the conditions that are required on my part towards the obtaining of it. This is praying with faith; and thus every one that prays ought to be affected, otherwise he doth great injury to God, or is guilty of unbelief in the promises of Jesus Christ. But then this is quite a different thing from praying with a persuasion or assurance that the thing we pray for shall be granted us; for that supposeth both that we are certain that that we pray for is for God's glory and for our good, and likewise that we are certain that we have performed all the conditions that are required on our part for the obtaining of it: but I doubt very few can satisfy themselves as to both these things.

But, secondly, there is another notion of praying in faith besides this, and which I believe is chiefly intended by St. James, in that passage of his I before quoted; namely, taking faith in the ordinary signification of it, that is to say, for a firm adherence to the doctrine of Christ, a constancy in the profession

and practice of the Christian religion; so that to pray in faith is to pray to God with a full purpose of heart, (let what will come,) to believe and to live like a Christian, not to use any indirect means, or to depart from the sincerity of my Christian profession, for the gaining any ends whatsoever. This, I say, seems to be the sense of the apostle in this place. His design, in this chapter, is to comfort the Christians under their persecutions; *Count it all joy,* saith he, *when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.* But now, lest it should be objected that a man may want wisdom and discretion to manage himself under these trials and temptations, and so for want of that miscarry; to obviate that, he tells them, in the next verse, how they may furnish themselves with that wisdom and discretion that is necessary for them, namely, by asking it of God: *But then,* saith he, *it will be fit that they ask it in faith, not wavering;* that is to say, they must keep close to God, having no inconstancy or uncertainty in their minds as to that point. They must not be like some of the Jewish Christians at that time, who, for fear of persecution, were at any time ready to forsake Christ. No; if they were of this humour, they were no better than *waves of the sea, driven and tossed by every wind;* and such men must never think they *shall receive any thing of the Lord; being double-minded and unstable in all their ways.* If they will obtain wisdom, let them behave themselves in persecution as they ought; let them stick fast to their profession, and let them never

waver in that; and then they shall be sure to be assisted of God.

Taking now this for a true account of this passage, it appears, that for us *to pray in faith* doth not so much consist in a confidence that our prayers shall be heard, (which is the common opinion,) but in putting up our prayers in a firm belief of Christianity, and hearty resolution to adhere to it, in a constant practice of what it requires, fixing it firmly in our hearts that we will not depart from any point of our duty, nor use any unwarrantable means, nor do the least thing that is inconsistent with the religion we profess, though it were for the gaining the greatest worldly good or advantage; and certainly, whoever comes to God thus qualified, his prayers will never fail of acceptance.

Thirdly, another condition that God requires in our prayers, in order to their being effectual, is, that we pray in charity. This is a thing which our Saviour hath laid great stress upon; for he hath expressly and particularly mentioned it in that form of prayer which he taught his disciples, and which all Christians ever since have constantly used to put up to God among their daily devotions. Nay, he hath so mentioned it, that every one that saith that prayer must be intolerably impudent in saying it, if he be not in charity with all the world. For if you mind it, we cannot use the Lord's Prayer without making a solemn profession before God that we desire the forgiveness of our sins upon no other terms than our forgiving those that have offended us: *Forgive us our trespasses*, say we, *as we forgive them that trespass against us.* And, which is further observable, when our Saviour had delivered this prayer to

his disciples, to be for ever used by them, he makes no reflection, no observation upon any other of the petitions but only this, (which seems to be a further enforcing of this business of charity,) a putting an emphasis upon it in an extraordinary manner. *If*, saith he, just after he had concluded the prayer, *ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses*, Matthew vi. 14. Nay, so indispensable a qualification he hath made this, of being in charity with all men, in order to the putting up our prayers to God, that he tells us plainly, that though we are just a going to say our prayers, though we have brought our sacrifice to the altar, in order to the offering it up to God, yet if we even then *remember that our brother hath ought against us*, if we then call to mind that we are at difference with any man, that we have done any injury that we have not made satisfaction for, that there is any breach between us and our neighbour, which through our fault is not made up; in that case we are to leave our sacrifice, unoffered as it is, before the altar, and *go our ways, and first to be reconciled to our brother, and then afterwards to come and offer our gift*, Matt. v. 23, 24. I heartily wish this point was seriously considered by all those that pretend to be the disciples of Jesus Christ; if it was, there either would be more charity or less pretence of religion and devotion; men would either live peaceably, and maintain perfect love and friendship and society one with another, or they could not say their daily prayers without their flying back in their faces: they would blush to think of the impudence with

which they approached the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Fourthly, another condition that is required of us in our prayers, in order to the having them accepted, is, that we put them all up in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Three or four times doth our Saviour mention this condition to his disciples; *Whatsoever*, saith he, *ye shall ask in my name, that will I do*, John xiv. 13. And again, in the next verse, *If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.* And again, in the next chapter, and the 16th verse, *that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you:* and so again in the sixteenth chapter and the 23d verse, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.* This is a piece of duty and honour that all we Christians to the world's end do owe to our Master Jesus Christ; and indeed without the payment of it we have no warrant to expect that our prayers will find acceptance. Certain it is, that it is upon the account and for the sake of Jesus Christ, and the merits of that sacrifice which he once offered upon the cross, and which he now, as our High Priest, continually exhibits and presents to God our Father in the highest heavens: it is, I say, for the sake and in the consideration of this, that God hath made any promise to mankind, that he will be merciful or gracious to them, or that he will accept any sacrifice of prayer or praise that they offer to him. It is to this that we owe the pardon of our sins, and the grace and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and the

favour of God, and the peace of our conscience, and, in a word, all the benefits, both spiritual or temporal, or eternal, that we hope for from our prayers. And therefore infinite reason is there, that we should make acknowledgments of this to God whenever we make approaches to him: Christ is the standing, perpetual Mediator between God and man; and through him only we can have access to the Father: and therefore to present our petitions, either in our own name, or in any other name but his, is to forsake that method which God hath put us into for the obtaining benefits from him. Indeed, one of the two great offices that our Saviour now executes in heaven, and which he will execute to the end of the world, is, to present the prayers of all his servants unto God, and with them to present the merits of his own sacrifice, that in the consideration thereof they may be accepted; and in this chiefly consists the exercise of Christ's everlasting priesthood. Our prayers, without his presenting them, would not be effectual; it is his intercession that procures the answer and return of them. And therefore certainly in us, that know this method of God's hearing and granting of prayer, it would be intolerable to put up any prayers without mention of, or respect to, our Lord Jesus Christ. Let others therefore, who are not so well instructed in the Christian dispensation, address to whom they please, and by what mediators they please, *whether in heaven or in earth, as there be gods many, and lords many so called: but to us there is but one God the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him, and one Mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him*, as the apostle hath told us.

But, fifthly and lastly, another condition required of us, if we would receive benefits by our prayers, is, that to our prayers we join our own endeavours for the obtaining what we pray for. We are then to expect the answer of God to our petitions when we do vigorously put out all that strength he hath given us, and make use of all those means he hath prescribed us for the effecting our desires. To think that God will do our work alone without any concurrence of ours, save only our saying, *Lord, have mercy upon me!* is most foolish and ridiculous; it is just the madness of those men that the orator laughs at, who, when a storm of great hailstones fell upon their heads, they cried mightily to God to deliver them from the danger, but never stirred a step to seek for shelter. If God had made us mere engines and machines, I grant it were reasonable to expect he should carry us on to the end he made us for, without any help of ours; but since God hath given us reason to direct us, and eyes to see with, and hands to act with, and feet to go with, and hath so contrived our natures, that happiness is to be the reward of our own choice, and not the effect of irresistible power, it is the extremity of folly to think that our prayers, without our endeavours, will do us any good; nay, indeed it is impudence to wish it: he that desires to obtain any blessing, either spiritual or temporal, without his doing all he can towards it, his prayer is just of the same strain of modesty, as if he should say in these terms, Lord, give me this or the other blessing which thou seest I want, but at the same time be pleased to forget that thou hast made me a rational creature; deal with me as if I were a stock or a stone, and could do nothing towards the helping

myself. I want this blessing; O let me have it, though it be against all the reason in the world that I should have it; and thou thyself canst not grant it me, but thou must depart from all those wise and good rules and methods which thou hast set down to thyself in the government of the world.

Doth not such a prayer as this deserve to be answered? Yes, certainly, but with indignation and scorn; and yet such prayers as these do we all make to God when we pray without endeavouring: as, for instance, when we pray to God to forgive us our sins, and yet take no care to amend our lives; when we pray to God to strengthen our good purposes and resolutions, and yet take no care to think, and to consider, and to renew them frequently; when we pray to be delivered from this or the other particular sin that we are too apt to fall into, and yet do not guard ourselves against it; take no care to avoid those temptations that usually betray us into it, nor make use of those remedies which prudence and religion do furnish us with for the avoiding it. Above all things therefore it concerns us, that at the same time we pray to be good, we sincerely, in all our actions, do endeavour to be so; that at the same time we pray for God's grace and holy Spirit, we do what we can to allure and draw him down into our hearts, by purifying ourselves from all worldly and carnal lusts, and by cherishing and encouraging all the good motions we feel in our souls. No, a great many have found to their cost the vanity of such an imagination: they have prayed most heartily and feelingly against such particular sins as they are most inclined to, and for the attainment of such particular virtues as they most needed; and yet it has often happened,

that, on the very same day when they have made these devout prayers, they have been overtaken by that sin they prayed against, and rather gone backwards than forwards, as to the virtue they aspired after. How now comes this to pass? did not God hear their prayers? They indeed are apt to think so, and to charge him with unkindness for it; but they are much to blame for so doing: there is no doubt but that God did thus far hear and grant their petitions, that he did all that was needful on his part for the preventing those sins and increasing those virtues which were the subject of their prayers. He gave grace and strength sufficient to the men for the producing those effects they did desire: but the men did not do their part; they did not make use of that strength, they did not watch over themselves as they should have done; they did not endeavour to avoid those temptations which used to betray them into that sin, nor take those opportunities which God put into their hands for the improving of their virtue; and here the fault of the miscarriage is to be laid. God is always ready and willing to send down his influences and communications upon every soul that is prepared and disposed to receive them: and that grace which he affords shall always have that effect we desire, if we do but cooperate with it, if we by our sloth and negligence do not betray the cause of God to the common enemy.

Christians, therefore, all of you that hear me this day, if ever you mean to be good, if ever you mean to be happy, if ever you expect God's favour and acceptance in this world and in the other, let me desire you to consider and remember this: as the great business of your life, in order to the attaining

these ends, must be to pray to God most earnestly and constantly for his direction, and assistance, and influence, and blessing, in all that you go about; and as you must put up your prayers in faith, and charity, and in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, our great Mediator; so it will also concern you particularly, if you would have these prayers effectual, to contribute yourselves to the efficacy of them, by using your earnest endeavours to work in and for yourselves all that you desire God to work in you and for you. You are, on the one hand, so to pray, as if God was to do all, and you could do nothing, (as it is certainly true;) and yet, on the other hand, you are so to labour and endeavour, as if the whole success of the business did depend upon yourselves, (and this is true also:) if you fail in either of these things, you will be disappointed in your aims; but if you join both together, you may depend upon it that God will give you every thing that is needful for you: and however things go, you shall at least be tolerably happy in this world, but unspeakably for ever happy in the next.

Which that we may all be, God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

A SERMON

ON

1 COR. XIV. 15.

What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also.

THIS text, at the first view, seems a little remote from the business of this day, which is to commemorate the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the apostles, and the manifold and wonderful gifts which he then conferred upon them: but when it comes to be explained, you will see it perfectly falls in with that argument; the subject-matter of this text, as you will find, being one of those spiritual, extraordinary powers of the Holy Ghost then given to them; which are the proper objects of our meditation on this day.

There is none of us so ignorant as not to have heard of this term of *praying by the Spirit*, or so little acquainted with the state of religion in this nation, as not to be sensible what a bone of contention it has been, and still is amongst us. All parties do agree that we ought to *pray by the Spirit* as much as we can; that is, that we ought by all means to endeavour after the assistance of the Holy Spirit in our prayers, and that then we pray most effectually to God when we are most assisted by him. Thus far, I say, we are all agreed; but then, here we come to be divided; some of us think, (namely, those that are of the communion of the church,) that, as the measure of the Spirit's assistance is now afforded in the world, all the influence we are to ex-

pect from the Spirit in our prayers is exciting in us pious desires, and devout affections, and faith in God, and resignation of ourselves to him, and those other qualities and dispositions of mind that tend to make our prayers acceptable to our heavenly Father.

But as to the form of our prayers, whether they be long or short, whether they be put into words, or sent up in thoughts and wishes, or if put into words, whether they be conceived on a sudden or premeditated, or whether they be in a set form of our composing, or in a form of words appointed us by others, we think these things no way concern our *praying by the Spirit;* we think we may as much pray by the Spirit in one way as in the other.

If we make any difference it is this, that at all times we think it more decent and more suitable to the reverence and dread we ought to have of the divine Majesty, to offer up to him such prayers as we have well studied and thought on, than the sudden eruptions of our minds, especially in our more solemn addresses to the throne of grace; but then when we come to worship God in public, we think it not only a matter of decency, but of duty too, if any set form be enjoined us by authority, to let alone our private conceived prayers, and to make use of that form.

On the contrary, there are others among us that think we may expect the same assistance of the Spirit in our prayers that the apostles and other first Christians in the miraculous times did, and that God doth inspire his servants, especially his ministers, both with the matter of their prayers, and with the form too; putting not only the things that they should pray for into their hearts, but the very words

and phrases into their mouths; and they account that this is the only *praying by the Spirit;* from whence they conclude, that no set forms of prayer are to be allowed, especially in the public service of God, because they are human inventions, of man's making, and not dictated or inspired by the Holy Ghost: the result of which sort of notions and principles is this, that upon occasion hereof not only a great disgust is taken at our worship, but men think themselves obliged in conscience to separate from our communion, because our church is so far from enjoining, that she discourages those spiritual prayers, tying us up to a set form of service. How, say they, can we join with your church, when your service is only will-worship? You have no *praying by the Spirit* among you, but every one reads his prayers out of a book: can that be a pure apostolical church of Christ that thus suppresses and stifles the gifts of the Spirit, expressly contrary to the apostle's command, who bids us *not to quench the Spirit?*

This, as I take it, is the state of the difference amongst us, as to the point of *praying by the Spirit;* not that I would insinuate that all the Dissenters carry the matter so far as I have now represented; for a great many of them do allow of forms of prayer, nay, and zealously contend for them; but others are as much against them, and that upon the grounds I have now mentioned.

Having so fair an occasion now given me, (the argument of the day being the gifts of the Spirit,) I mean with all plainness and brevity to discuss this matter; and I hope I shall put it in so fair a light, that there can no doubt remain with any one on what side of the question the truth lies: and I will

do my endeavour likewise to manage this dispute with such temper, that even they that are of a different opinion shall have no reason to be offended; for I often think of a saying of Mr. Chillingworth's, "I would in the pulpit use none as enemies but the "Devil and sin."

The method I shall take in the discussing this point shall be to make out these four following propositions; which, if they can be made out, all the difficulty that seems to be in this argument does perfectly vanish.

First of all, therefore, I shall shew that *praying by the Spirit*, in the sense that the apostle meant, is so far from being a perpetual duty required of all Christians, that, as far as we know, no Christian now living can with reason pretend to that gift.

Secondly, I shall shew that that which is now called *praying by the Spirit*, that is, the conceiving of prayers on a sudden, without study and premeditation, and expressing our conceptions with great fluency and movingness of words and gestures, is so far from being the immediate effect of the Spirit of God, that, generally speaking, it is the effect of art or industry, or a present heat of temper.

Thirdly, I shall shew, that if there be any other notion of *praying by the Spirit* in scripture, such as is to be extended to all times and ages of Christianity, and is not peculiar to the apostolical age, that notion will every jot as well fit and suit with set forms of prayer, as with those prayers that we call *extemporary*.

Fourthly, I shall shew that though we should suppose that God, even in these days, doth assist men both as to the matter and even the words of

their prayers, yet we have more reason to believe that the public prayers of the church were indited and contrived by that Spirit of God, than we have to believe that any private man's prayers are, and consequently that when we use them we pray as much by the Spirit as when we use sudden conceived prayers.

I begin with the first of these propositions, which is this; that *praying by the Spirit*, in the sense of the text I am now upon, (which indeed is the chief text that gave rise to this expression, and accordingly the meaning of the expression ought to be governed by the meaning of the text; I say, *praying by the Spirit*, as the apostle here speaks of it,) is so far from being a perpetual duty required of all Christians, that it is much to be doubted whether any Christian now living can with any reason pretend to that gift.

And the reason is evident, because this was one of the extraordinary, miraculous gifts, which God, for the gaining credit to Christianity, and supplying the necessities of the then infant church, was pleased to confer upon the apostles and other Christians of that age; which gifts, as Christianity got footing in the world, did by degrees wear out, and at last perfectly ceased.

Now that *praying by the Spirit* was one of those extraordinary graces, it is plain enough from the whole discourse of the apostle in this chapter; for, according to him, *praying with the Spirit*, and *singing with the Spirit*, and *blessing with the Spirit*, are but so many several exercises of the gift of languages, or that power which the Christians were then endowed with of speaking in unknown tongues which they had never learnt.

I shall make the matter very plain to you. The church of Corinth, to whom St. Paul writes this Epistle, was at that time favoured with many eminent gifts of the Spirit: but it seems several of those that had these gifts did not make that use of them which they were given for; for whereas the gift of tongues was chiefly bestowed for the conversion of infidels, to be *a sign*, (as the apostle speaks in ver. 22. of this chapter,) *not to them that believe, but to them that believe not;* those men took a pride in exercising this gift in the Christian congregation, making prayers, and hymns, and thanksgivings, at their public meetings, in a language that the people understood not, and consequently from which they could receive no benefit. This abuse now it is the design of the apostle in this chapter to reform, and at the same time to regulate the exercise of their other several gifts; and the great rule which he lays down in this matter is, that all things in the church ought to be done with decency and order, and to the edification of the congregation; and that no spiritual gift is any further valuable than as it is employed to the benefit of others, and consequently either let them not at all make use of their gift of languages in the church, or if they will make use of it, let them either themselves, or some other for them, interpret to the people what they mean, so that the whole congregation may understand and be edified. If we now take this key, we shall have an easy entrance into the sense of this whole chapter.

At this time I shall concern myself with no more of it than what is needful for the giving light to my text; let it be observed therefore, that two verses before my text the apostle gives this advice, namely,

in the 13th verse; *Wherefore*, saith he, *let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue* (he means of speaking in the Christian assemblies) *pray that he may interpret.* This advice he backs with this reason, in the verse before my text, *For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful.* As if he had said, The necessity of speaking in a known tongue, or at least of interpreting what is spoken in an unknown tongue, doth appear from hence; that if any of us do in the congregation pray, for instance, in an unknown tongue, it is true the Spirit within him prayeth, or he doth indeed pray by the Spirit, but nevertheless if he make none but such prayers, or do not interpret such when he makes them, his mind, his meaning is unfruitful, yields no profit to the hearer, others receive no benefit, no edification by what he prayeth: that is plainly the sense of this verse. And then it follows in the words of my text, *What is it then? I will pray with the Spirit, I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the Spirit, I will sing with the understanding also;* that is, If I do sometimes make use of my gift of tongues, that the Spirit hath bestowed upon me, either in praying or singing of psalms, yet I will also take care so to pray and sing as to be understood; I will not be so wholly taken up in praying and singing by the Spirit, but I will pray and sing also as others do, that have not that gift of the Spirit; that is, in a language that the congregation understands as well as myself; or if I do pray by the Spirit, I will at least take care to interpret.

That this is the true and the only sense here of *praying by the Spirit* and *praying with the under-*

standing, is undeniably plain from what follows in the four next ensuing verses; for thus the apostle goes on in verses 16—19: *Otherwise when thou shalt bless with the Spirit*, (that is, praise God,) *how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at the giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified. I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than you all: yet in the church I would rather speak five words with understanding, that by my voice I might teach others, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.*

You see here all along, that *speaking by the Spirit* is speaking in an unknown language; and *speaking with the understanding* is speaking words that others may understand.

Taking this now to be a true account of the text, as without doubt it is, we have got these four things by it:

First of all, in general, that the gift of *praying by the Spirit* was in the number of those miraculous, extraordinary gifts, that were in a plentiful manner showered down by the Holy Spirit upon the apostles on this day of Pentecost, and, by laying on their hands, communicated to others afterwards during that age.

Secondly, for the more particular account of this gift, it was a branch of the gift of tongues, or rather, to speak properly, it was one of the instances by which the gift of languages was expressed.

Thirdly, that this faculty of *praying by the Spirit* was so far from being the most useful or edifying, or the most desirable gift in the church, that St.

Paul prefers prophesying (that is, the gift of preaching or interpreting scripture) far before it, as you may see in the four first verses of this chapter: nay, he prefers praying in the ordinary way, before *praying by the Spirit*, telling us, that he had rather speak five words in the church to be understood, than a thousand in an unknown language, though yet that language was inspired by the Spirit.

Fourthly, from all that has been said it appears, that no man now living can with any greater reason pretend to this gift of *praying by the Spirit*, in the sense the apostle speaks of it, than he can to the power of speaking strange languages without ever having learnt them, or than he can to the power of discovering thoughts, or curing all diseases, or foretelling things to come, or any other of the spiritual gifts that the apostle here treats of.

But it may be asked, is there no other notion of *praying by the Spirit* than that we have now mentioned? Did not the Holy Spirit of God furnish his servants with matter to pray for in those days, as well as languages to pray in? and did he not inspire them to pray in a known language, as well as in an unknown? and this immediately, so that when they prayed they might be truly said *to be filled with the Holy Ghost?*

I answer, perhaps it might, nay, for my part, I think it probable it was so; we have many reasons to incline us to believe that in the first age of Christianity, when the church was propagated and governed in an extraordinary way, and there were many sudden emergent necessities to be supplied, which could not at that time be provided for in the regular way that God hath since taken care they

shall be; I say, it is very probable, that, as God did inspire some with a miraculous gift of interpreting scripture, and applying types and prophecies, and others with a gift of composing psalms and hymns for the benefit of the church, and others with the gift of foretelling things to come, he did others also with *the gift of prayer*, prompting and enabling them, in an extraordinary manner, to put up such petitions, as their own spirits could never have suggested to them, but which were suitable to the present exigency and necessities of the church: and of those persons it may be truly said, that they prayed by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost: and I must confess, of this way of *praying by the Spirit* I would interpret that famous and difficult passage of St. Paul, in Rom. viii. 26, 27. where he hath these words: *Likewise*, saith he, *the Spirit helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered; and he that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.*

It is plain that he is here speaking of those that had the first-fruits of the Spirit, that is, were endowed with extraordinary gifts, such as we have been all this while speaking of. This appears from the 23d verse, and therefore it is most likely that *the Spirit's helping their infirmities*, and *making intercession for them*, which is extraordinary exciting and directing some particular persons to put up prayers for the congregation, and inspiring them with strong desires and earnest groans after such

and such things; which though they could not fully comprehend the meaning of, yet God, who knew the mind of the Spirit, saw that they were for the good of the church.

Thus I am sure St. Chrysostom (the best interpreter of scripture of all the ancients) expounds the place, whose words, because they are remarkable, and give a clear account of the text, I shall translate to you.

Having named this text, he tells us, "That it "was a very obscure passage, because many of those "miracles which were done in the time when St. "Paul wrote that Epistle were now ceased in the "world. Therefore," saith he, "in order to the "opening the sense of this place, it will be necessary "to acquaint you with the state of things at that "time: now what was that? Why, God bestowed "several gifts on all those that undertook the pro-"fession of Christianity; which gifts were also "called by the name of *the Spirit.* One, for in-"stance, obtained *the gift of prophecy,* and did fore-"tell future events; another had *the gift of wisdom,* "and instructed the people; another had *the gift of* "*healing,* and he cured the sick; another had *the* "*gift of power,* and he raised the dead; another "had *the gift of tongues,* and he spake in several "languages. Moreover, with all these there was a "*gift of prayer,* which is also called by the name of "*the Spirit;* and he that had this prayed for all "the multitude. For, because, not knowing many "of those things which are good for us, we desire "those that are not, (as it is said here, *we know* "*not what to pray for as we ought,*) *the gift of* "*prayer* came upon some man, and he stood up in

" the name of all, to desire that which was good for " the church in common, and taught others to do it. " And he that was thought worthy of this gift stood " with much compunction, and many groans, (such " as prostrate a man's mind before God,) and asked " those things that were for the public benefit; cor- " respondent whereunto in our time is the minister " of the congregation, when he offers to God the " prayers for the people." Thus far St. Chrysostom.

But now taking all this for granted, that men in those days, especially the public ministers of the church, were thus immediately inspired by the Holy Ghost in their prayers for the congregation; yet it doth not from hence follow, that any Christian now either is so inspired, or ought to expect it. For this you see was one of the *charismata*, one of the spiritual gifts peculiar to that age; and there is not the same reason that it should be vouchsafed now: and if any one would make us believe he is endowed with such a gift, he ought in reason to give us evidence of his having some of the other gifts that were then common in the church: if he can infallibly expound all difficult passages of scripture, or read the Hebrew Bible in his mother-tongue, having yet never learned that language; then we may be inclined to believe that he can *pray by the Spirit*, as those apostolical persons did.

But what then is the sense of St. Paul when he bids you *not to quench the Spirit?* 1 Thess. v. 19. Is not this a command that concerns all Christians? And is not the meaning of it that they should not stifle the inspiration of the Spirit when they are at prayers by any set form, but freely speak as the Spirit gives them utterance?

I answer, that this text also refers to those extraordinary gifts of the Spirit we have been all this while speaking of; as appears by the precept which follows after it, *Quench not the Spirit, despise not prophesyings.* And therefore it doth no way concern us otherwise than by way of accommodation; and the plain sense of it is no more than this, that those Christians whom God had blessed with those miraculous powers, whether they were *the gifts of healing*, or *of tongues*, or any of the rest, they should be very careful that they did not, either by their careless life, or their neglect to make use of them to good purposes, occasion God's withdrawing of them: for if they made an ill use, or no use of them, he that gave them would take them away; that heavenly fire of the Spirit would by these means be extinguished in their hearts.

And thus much let it suffice to have spoken on the first point, which I have been the longer upon, for the sake of explaining those texts of scripture which have moved so many scruples in men's minds.

Secondly, I now come to the second point, which is this; that that which we nowadays are used to call *praying by the Spirit*, that is, the conceiving prayers on a sudden, without study or premeditation, and expressing our conceptions with great fluency, and movingness of speech and action, is not often, as we are apt to take it, the immediate effect of the Spirit of God, and inspiration; but, generally speaking, the work of art or industry, or the present heat of a man's head.

Far am I here from disparaging the gift of voluntary and extemporary prayer, or crying down the use of it; it is certainly, as all other accomplish-

ments that a man has, the very *gift of God*, and great benefit may redound both to a man's self and others by a prudent and discreet use of it. And much further am I from denying the necessity of the Holy Spirit's concurrence or assistance in our prayers; on the contrary, I believe that whosoever is not assisted by the Spirit when he prays, cannot pray as he ought to do, and I doubt not but both those that pray in a form, and without one, if they be pious, good persons, are assisted by the Spirit when they pray. But this I say, the faculty of praying plausibly, fluently, and movingly, in an extemporary way, if we consider it in itself, is not in these days an inspired gift; but rather a gift of nature, or an acquisition of art, or rather, to speak properly, a gift acquired by art in a person that has a nature and genius fitted for it. My reasons for this are very briefly these:

First of all, there are as certain rules and methods for the attaining this faculty of voluntary extemporary prayer, as there are for the attaining any other art and science. The truth of this appears both from the books that have been written to teach men the *gift of praying*, and the experience of many that have been eminent in this gift, who, if they be asked, cannot deny but that they came by it in the same way that they come by other acquired gifts; that is to say, by reading the word of God, and other divine books, by study and meditation, by well digesting in their minds the several heads of matter that are either to be confessed or prayed for, or thanks returned for them; by treasuring up in their memories, out of the scripture and other good books, apt and fit phrases for the expressing these matters;

and, lastly and principally, by much use and exercise; and there is no doubt but whoever useth this method shall in a little time attain to a competent skill and readiness in this gift of extemporary prayer; supposing he hath but a sufficient stock of natural parts, and a genius that lies that way. I add these two last things, because every art requires a peculiar capacity and fitness of temper in him that is to learn it; so that though it have in it certain and fixed maxims and precepts, and so is teachable, yet it is not teachable to every person, because every person is not qualified with natural abilities for the learning of it. There are several that may prove very good mathematicians, that yet would make but very bad orators, because their parts are suited very well for one science, but not so well for the other; and this rule holds in this very gift we are speaking of, as well as others. Those that have a competent memory, and a good assurance, and a ready presence of mind to recollect things on a sudden, and a dexterity in putting them handsomely together, and expressing their conceptions easily and naturally; these are much better contrived in their natures for the gift of prayer, and shall much sooner obtain it, than those whose natural talents lie another way; yet for all this, the whole thing is an art notwithstanding.

And that it is so is in the second place very easily discoverable to any diligent observer, even from the way of the management and performance of it. For, if ever we have given ourselves to observe the prayers of this kind, we shall find, that though the speaker doth not confine himself to any particular set form, but varies his prayers every time; yet, in the compass of a few prayers, both the same heads

of matter will return, and the very same set of phrases and expressions likewise; though perhaps not marshalled just in the same method or order: so that any one that has been long used to a particular person, may, upon the reading of a prayer copied from his mouth, be able to say, without a mistake, This prayer is of the composure of such a man. If now this be true, doth it not shew that the gift of praying on a sudden is rather the effect of art and use than of the immediate inspiration of the Spirit? Nay, is it not an evidence that these sort of prayers are not so sudden and extemporary as we take them for? but are really owing to a set form or scheme both of matter and phrases, which the person that useth them hath fixed in his mind, though we discover it not?

But, thirdly, there is this further evidence that the faculty of extemporary prayer is not from the immediate inspiration of the Spirit, but from something else; because those that are happiest at this kind of way cannot always pray alike; but at several times find a great difference in their performances: sometimes they can with great freedom *pour out their souls unto God*, as the word is, at other times they are much straitened in spirit; sometimes a great plenty of matter offers itself to them, and they can utter it with great volubility of tongue and aptness of expression, and excite strange passions and affections in the hearers; at other times they are barren and dry, and their words come with difficulty; and, whilst their inventions are at work in searching for new matter, they are forced to fill up the intermediate spaces with such words and phrases as come first to hand, or are most at

their tongue's end, or else with the repetition of the same thing over again. It is no disparagement to any man's parts sometimes to be reduced to these inconveniences; for the eloquentest man in the world, if he speak without premeditation, and thinks himself obliged to speak a considerable time, cannot avoid them. But, in the mean time, this is a shrewd argument, that these kind of prayers are not dictated or indited by the Holy Ghost; for he cannot be supposed to be ever at a loss for furnishing those tongues that he makes his instruments with what is next to be spoken.

But, fourthly, if what has been said be not true; if the faculty of praying eloquently and devoutly on a sudden be not a natural gift or acquired art, but the immediate inspiration of the Spirit, as some of us have thought, it will be a hard matter to rid ourselves of several consequences which we should be loath to own.

I only name these two: first, it will follow from hence that all those prayers that are made in this way, have in them as much divinity, as much infallible truth, and are of as great authority, as the word of God; and that, if they be put into writing, they ought to be as much reverenced by us, and by all Christians, as the holy scripture; for, according to this doctrine, the Holy Ghost is as much the author of these, as he is of the inspired books.

And, secondly, another consequence of this doctrine is this; that upon supposition hereof we must be forced to father upon the Holy Ghost, not only all the indecencies, all the indiscretions, all the vain repetitions or impertinences, that any extemporary prayers that have been put up in the church have

had in them: but if there have been any thing worse than these; if ever any rude language hath been given to God Almighty; if ever any false representations have been made of his attributes; if ever any unsound doctrines have been couched in prayer, tending to faction or rebellion, or the like, all these things must have the patronage of the Spirit, who must be supposed to be the author or inspirer of them.

But I take no pleasure in mentioning these things, and therefore I will not insist upon them, but pass on to the third general proposition I am to make out; and that is this: If there be any other notion of *praying by the Spirit* in scripture, such as is to be extended to all times and ages of Christianity, and is not peculiar to the first; that notion will every whit as well suit with forms of prayer, as with these that are conceived upon the sudden and present occasion.

There is a spirit of prayer spoken of in scripture, which I doubt not but God hath endued, and doth and will endue his people with to the end of the world; and perhaps this phrase of *praying in the Spirit*, or *by the Spirit*, may in one or two texts be used in the same signification. So that *to pray by the Spirit* shall mean the same thing as *to have the spirit of prayer*. And in this sense nobody will question that *praying by the Spirit* is a perpetual duty, is of perpetual use, and denotes a perpetual assistance of the holy Spirit of God.

But now, what is this spirit of prayer? why, nobody that reads the scriptures, and considers how that term is there used, but will be satisfied that it imports neither more nor less than the grace of praying as we ought to do: just as *the spirit of wis-*

dom, or *the spirit of knowledge*, or *the spirit of truth*, or *the spirit of meekness*, are those several graces and virtues of wisdom, knowledge, truth, and meekness, that are wrought in us by the Holy Spirit. So that whoever reverently and humbly addresseth himself to God Almighty, seriously acknowledging, on one hand, his own vileness and unworthiness and manifold necessities; and on the other hand, God's infinite power and wisdom and goodness; professing to depend upon him entirely; dreading his displeasure, earnestly seeking his grace and favour, and devoutly rendering thanks to him for all his mercies; such a man hath *the spirit of prayer*. When he prays with this mind, with these dispositions, with these devout affections, he truly *prays by the Spirit;* because these qualities are wrought in him by the Spirit of God; he had not had them but through the influence and assistance of the Holy Ghost. But now, I beseech you, what is all this either to praying by a form, or praying in an extemporary way? why may not I be thought to have these qualifications, these devout affections, this ardour and fervency of mind towards God, when I pray in words ready made to my hands, as well as when I pray in words that I thought not on before? and, consequently, why must I be said to *pray by the Spirit* in one way, and not in the other? Add to this, in the last place, which is the fourth proposition I am to speak to, that though we should suppose that God, even in these days, doth assist men, both as to the matter and even the words of their prayers; yet we have as much reason to believe that the public prayers of the church were indited and contrived by that Spirit of God, as we have to believe that any private man's prayers are,

and consequently that when we use them we pray as much by the Spirit as when we use extemporary prayer.

This proposition is so evident, that I need speak very few words towards the clearing of it. The thing lies here; whether is it not at least as likely that when a company of learned, religious, devout men are met together, by the command of authority, to consider of a public standing Liturgy to be used in the church, and spare no care, nor pains, nor study, to form one as exactly as may be, according to the will of God declared in holy scripture; and not only so, but earnestly desire of God the assistance and direction of his Spirit to go along with them in that work; I say, whether is it not at least as probable that such men as these, taking this method, shall be extraordinarily assisted by the Spirit in the carrying on this undertaking; nay, (and if the Spirit nowadays does vouchsafe such inspirations,) shall be immediately inspired both as to the matter and the words that they agree upon, as it is probable that a particular person that comes up in a congregation shall, without any premeditation or care of his, be thus inspired? Can we reasonably imagine that God's Spirit will indite a prayer for this latter man, will dictate to him what he is to say, and will take no care of the former, give them no assistance in the forming of their prayers? Sure the thing is inconceivable! And yet this is directly the case of our Common Prayer on one hand, and extemporary public prayer on the other; so that if we will not be partial in our giving judgment, we ought to think that when we pray by the public Liturgy we pray at least as much (if not more) the prayers of the

Spirit, as when we go along with a man that uses his extemporary faculty.

And thus have I gone through the four points I proposed; and I hope by this time you are convinced what little force there is in all that noise that has been made about *praying by the Spirit*, to make us quit our public Liturgy for extemporary prayer.

I might add abundance of things more, (if I would enter into a common-place,) both about the needfulness and expediency of a set form of service in the worship of God, but my business was only to explain a text: only one thing further I cannot but take notice of, because my text leads me to it. You may observe here, that St. Paul joins those two things together, *praying with the Spirit*, and *singing with the Spirit. What is it then?* (saith he) *I will pray with the Spirit, I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the Spirit, I will sing with the understanding also.* Praying, and singing of psalms, as they do now, so they did in those times, always go together in the public worship of God.

Well now, what do we infer from hence? Why, you shall see: if *praying by the Spirit* be extemporary praying, in opposition to a form, then certainly *singing by the Spirit* must be extemporary singing, in opposition to the reading of psalms out of a book: if we be for the one, we ought not certainly to be against the other; and yet there is none of us that I know of, (except the quakers perhaps,) but are so far from being against it, that they are zealous for the singing psalms that are in the end of the Bible. Here we can dispense with a form, and a constant form in the worship of God, and think too that this form will well enough consist with *sing-*

ing by the Spirit; and is it not then unreasonable that we should scruple at a form of prayers, (a form too that hath much fewer exceptions to be made against it than those psalms have,) only upon this account or pretence, that we cannot *pray by the Spirit* in the use of it? If we think that we *sing by the Spirit* in a set form of words, in God's name why should we not as well think that we may *pray by the Spirit* in a set form of words also? For I am sure there is no difference in the world.

But I will hold you no longer; I come to a conclusion; and that is this, that all we who are of the communion of the church of England ought not only to be contented and satisfied that we have ever since the reformation had a Liturgy, and so good a one, but also most heartily to thank God for the continuance of it to us, and for the affording us such peaceable times, that we may without fear or danger, every day in the year, if we please, serve God in it; this is a blessing that the primitive Christians would have purchased with the dearest things they had in the world, though too many of us do make slight of it: but whatever prejudice some persons may lie under, as to our service or way of worship, I dare affirm, with the greatest assurance in the world, that it is a certain and safe way to salvation to all those that make use of it, provided they add the other qualifications of sincere piety, and soberness, and righteousness, in all their conversation, which the gospel of Christ requires of all its professors, and without which no man living, in any communion whatsoever, shall ever see the face of God.

Our worship is right, and sound, and agreeable both to the word of God and the platform of primi-

tive practice: and if our lives and conversations be but as unblameable as it is, I am as sure as I am that Christ's religion is true, that no man that useth it shall fail of being saved.

Let us, therefore, go on in the way we are in; let us take all opportunities of resorting to God's house, and there offering up our solemn sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving in those methods that the law hath appointed us; but, above all, let us come with humble, penitent, and contrite hearts, sensible of our sins, and solicitous for God's favour and mercy, and thankful for his mercies, and full of resolution to obey him, to love him, and to serve him all the days of our lives; and if we come thus qualified, assuredly we *pray by the Spirit*, we bless and thank God with the Spirit, we *sing with the Spirit*, as much as in these days it is given to any one to do; and God will hear our prayers, and accept our thanksgivings, and reward our service with all the happiness and conveniences of this life that he sees fit and proper for us; but to be sure with everlasting glory and felicities in the life to come: to which God bring us all, for the sake, &c.

A SERMON

ON

JOB XXI. 15.

—What profit should we have, if we pray unto him?

THE whole verse is this—

What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?

So said the atheists in the days of Job, and so we may hear some among us say now: for it is no strange thing, in this age, to hear men talk against the duties of religion as well as the doctrines of it, and against no duty more than that of praying to God, of which Job here speaks. This, though one would think it should be the most natural, the most reasonable duty in the world, considering that we are all the creatures of God, and do and must depend upon him continually for all the good we hope for, either here or hereafter, yet it is accounted by some amongst us a very unphilosophical, absurd thing: if we would place religion in acts of justice and beneficence, and such other moral virtues, they could be content so far to own it; nay, they would not be against the exercising our devotions to God by way of hymns and praises for his excellencies and wonderful works, though yet he stands in need of none of our service; but as for this business of praying to him, and tiring him every day with our petitions, and supplications, and intercessions, in which

the godly people spend most of their time, there is no sense, no reason in it, nay, they have unanswerable reasons to prove that all this is labour lost, and time spent very unprofitably.

It is my design, at this time, to vindicate this part of religion from the cavils and exceptions of this sort of men, and to give an answer to them that are apt to ask, with those that are here represented in my text, *What profit should we have, if we pray unto God?*

Now methinks, to those that put such a question as this, it should in reason be a sufficient answer to represent these following things:

First of all, That all good men who have ever seriously applied themselves to God by prayer, have always had, and still have, many and great instances and experience of God's answering their prayers: and there is no devout man (and such kind of men only are capable judges of this matter) but is ready to attest the truth of this; so that here is constant experience on the side of prayer against their philosophical doubt.

Secondly, It has been the general belief of all nations, in all ages, that God hears the prayers of good men, and answers them; and accordingly all nations have always made use of this way for the obtaining those benefits they stood in need of, and for the removing those evils they were pressed with, so that as there is experience on the side of praying to God, so there is likewise the universal consent and practice of all the world.

Thirdly, If we may believe God's revelations, which he hath made in the holy scriptures, we are certain that there is great profit and advantage to be found

in praying to God; for God hath in those scriptures made the most solemn promises that he will hear and grant all the prayers of his servants, if they be put up to him as they ought to be; and a great many instances we find in these scriptures wherein God hath remarkably made these promises good.

Fourthly and lastly, God hath in these scriptures laid so great a stress upon this duty of prayer, and declared it to be so necessary, in order to the obtaining the good things we stand in need of, that he hath told us, without our prayers we shall not have them; so that surely all these things considered, it is not in vain that we should serve God, neither is it without profit that we should pray unto him.

Well, but all this doth not satisfy that sort of people which we have to deal with: what do we talk to them of experience and revelations, so long as the thing itself is against reason, so long as in the nature of the thing it is absurd to think that our prayers should help us in any distress?

Now for the proof of this, they argue four several ways: some argue from the immutability of God's nature; others from his essential goodness; others from his eternal decrees; and lastly, others from the frame of the world, and the established course of nature. From all these topics they draw arguments, and they think very strong ones, to prove that our prayers signify nothing as to any real benefit we receive from them.

Well! let us, at this time, examine these their arguments one by one, and see what force there is in them for the inferring this conclusion; I am confident you will be satisfied that there is none at all,

though yet I shall give them all the weight they are capable of.

The first argument, against the needfulness or efficacy of prayer, is drawn from the immutability of the nature of God; and it runs thus: to suppose that our prayers are at any time effectual, or, which is all one, that God doth at any time grant the requests that are put up unto him, is to suppose that he doth upon our prayers bestow something upon us which without our prayers he would not have done; which is in effect to say, that our prayers can produce a change, an alteration in the mind of God; for before our prayers he was not inclined or disposed to give us such and such blessings, but after our prayers he is: so that, according to this doctrine, God is so far from being immutable by his nature, that it is in the power of the most contemptible man in the world to make him alter his purpose, which is very impious to affirm, and directly contrary even to our own scripture propositions, which declare, that *with God there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning*, James i. 17. and that *the Strength of Israel, as he cannot lie, so neither can he repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent*, 1 Sam. xv. 29.

This is the argument; but, in truth, if it be examined, it is a mere fallacy. God's hearkening to, or being moved by the prayers we put up to him, doth not in the least clash with his attribute of immutability. It is true, when upon our prayers God is pleased to give us those things we pray for, which without our prayers he would not have done, it cannot be denied but that there is a change somewhere; but if the matter be examined, it will be found to

be in us, and not in God. God's mind was always the same towards us; that is, he resolved, that if we humbly and heartily begged such or such things at his hands, we should have them; but if not, we should go without them. When therefore upon our prayers we obtain that grace or that blessing which we had not before, it is not he that is changed, but we. We, by performing the conditions he required of us, do look with another aspect to him, do entitle ourselves to another kind of dealing from him, than we could claim before. We have made ourselves capable of receiving those benefits which before we were not.

To put this yet into a clearer light, if it be possible. Suppose a father had a son that had carried himself very unworthily and disobediently to him, whereupon he is so displeased that he casts him off, and resolves never to receive him again, unless he comes and humbles himself, acknowledges his fault, and begs pardon: (which is the same thing with the prayer we are now speaking of:) but if he will do thus, he will be reconciled to him. We will suppose now that the son, by extremity of want, or other straits that he is reduced to, doth at last become sensible of his folly, and that sense puts him upon returning to his father, and closing with those conditions of pardon he is pleased to offer him; and accordingly, with the prodigal in the gospel, he comes home, and falling down before his father, he saith, *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son:* he confesseth his faults, and implores his father's forgiveness. Upon this, as it followeth in the parable, the father receiveth him, takes him home to

him, clothes him anew, grants all the requests he puts up to him, and makes a feast for his return. Here now is a most visible alteration. The son that was before in a most deplorable condition as can be, is now put into happy circumstances. The father that had before abandoned him, now receives him, and rejoiceth in him. But is this alteration produced in the father or in the son? Not in the father certainly; for he acts punctually according to his first resolutions or determinations that he had set down with himself, which indeed were infinitely just and reasonable. But the alteration is in the son, who, by performing the conditions which his father required of him, hath rendered himself a different object from what he was before; he was before an object of his father's wrath and displeasure; he is now an object of his pity and kindness: and accordingly, as he felt before the effects of the former, so now he feels the effects of the latter. But these different effects do no more argue any change or inconstancy in the father, than it doth imply a change or inconstancy in any person; that he is differently affected towards persons that have contrary qualities. The application of this is so easy to the case we are upon, that every body may make it.

And thus much of the first objection against prayer, drawn from God's immutability. The second is drawn from another attribute, and that is, God's infinite and essential goodness; and thus it proceeds. If God in his nature is the most perfect love and goodness that is conceivable, then it is certain he manages the affairs of the world in the best way that is possible: as he most truly knows what is most convenient for his creatures, and as his

power can easily effect what he knows to be so; so, if his goodness be equal either to his knowledge or his power, it shall certainly and eternally take effect, let all the world do what they can to the contrary: to suppose otherwise, is to suppose that it is possible for God to order and manage things better than he doth; which is as much as to say, that God is not so good as he may be conceived to be. If this now be admitted, what need is there that any of us should spend our breath in prayers for any thing. If it be fit that the things we desire should be given us, God's goodness is such, that he will give it us, whether we ask it or no. As he hath no need to be told of our wants, so needs he not to be importuned for a supply of them. On the other side, if what we pray for be not fitting or convenient for us, then all our praying, be it never so importunately, will be to no purpose; for God will do nothing but what is for the best.

This is the objection: but to one that considers well, it will appear to have no manner of force in it. It is granted that the goodness of God is infinite, and that he governs the world in the best way that is possible, and consequently he always will do that which is best, let us behave ourselves how we please. All this is granted: but doth it from hence follow, that we shall have all such things as we stand in need of, whether we pray for them or no? Not in the least. The plain state of the matter is this: the same God that will do always what is absolutely best for his creatures, knows that it is best for them, that in order to the partaking of his benefits they should pray for them; if they do not, why then he knows it is best that they should be denied them.

So that the necessity of God's acting for the best doth not in the least destroy the necessity of prayer, in order to our obtaining what we stand in need of: God will do always that which is best; but we are mistaken, if we think it is for the best that we should have our necessities supplied without the use of prayer. God will always take care of that which is most fit and convenient for his creatures, but he sees likewise, that it is then only fit and convenient that they should have this or the other mercy or blessing conferred upon them, when they heartily and earnestly pray for it.

This is the plain state of the case; from whence appears what little force there is in the objection. The truth is, this objection, if there was any weight in it, would as much strike at the use of all other means for the obtaining of what we want, as it does at prayer: for thus we may argue, for instance; if God sees it fit for me and for the world that I should recover of this sickness that I now lie under, or that I should live seven years longer, he will certainly take care that it shall be so, since his goodness is as infinite as his power; and whatever he can do, he will do, if it be for the best to be done. And therefore what need is there that I shall apply to a physician, or use any means for the recovery of my health; or to what purpose should I take pains for a livelihood, or so much as be at the trouble of putting meat to my mouth for the prolongation of my life?

This is just the very same argument that is used in the objection: but now, if any will be so easy as to be convinced hereby that there is no need of taking physic in the ease of sickness, or of eating

and drinking for the preserving their lives, I will allow they have reason to be convinced that there is no need of praying for the obtaining good things at the hand of God; but otherwise not.

But, thirdly, other people argue against prayer upon another topic; their objection is drawn from the eternal decrees of God: they suppose that all things that come to pass in the world (even the least) were foreordained by God from all eternity that they should so come to pass, and it is impossible they should happen otherwise; there is no event, no action so small and inconsiderable, but it is an object of God's predestination, and therefore must as certainly take place in its succession, as it is certain God's counsels are more steadfast than man's. Now, upon this supposition, what can our prayers signify? whatever shall befall us is already decreed, be it good or bad: and can we by our prayers hope to reverse the decrees of Heaven, or make void the counsels of God? If it be good, it will come upon us without our prayers; if it be bad, our prayers cannot prevent it.

This is the objection: but in answer thereto I desire to represent these four things:

First, this objection proves too much to prove any thing; for it concludes as much against the use of any human means or endeavours for the attaining of any thing, as it doth against prayer; which was a fault I took notice of in the last objection. May not every lazy, careless person use the same pretence of eternal decrees, whenever he is called upon to mind his business, or to take care of his health, or to look after the salvation of his soul? May he not say, As to the first of these, it is certain that God, long before I was born, determined the circumstances I should

be in, as to riches and poverty, and such kind of things? If he hath predetermined me to be rich, I shall certainly be so, without any care of mine. If to be poor, all my endeavours and diligence in my business will be to no purpose. Thus again, as to the other case; I can live no longer, and shall die no sooner than my appointed time, and therefore what matters it what dangers I run into, or what riots and debauches I am guilty of? Thus again, as to the business of our salvation, I am from all eternity either elected or reprobated; if I be one of the elect, then I shall certainly at last come to heaven, let my life be what it will, and therefore what need I think of repentance and holiness, and those other conditions they so much talk of? If these things be necessary, God will work them in me; he that hath designed the end will certainly take care of the means: on the other side, if I be in the number of the reprobate, to what purpose should I, by a solicitous and serious life, torment myself before the time; all my care and endeavour about my salvation cannot but be in vain, since the decrees of God are irreversible.

Thus you see the objection is as much levelled against all endeavours, and indeed against all human actions, as against prayer. I must confess I cannot answer the argument, if we admit the doctrine of God's decrees to be so as is represented in the objection. But yet for all that, there is none of us do believe this argument to be conclusive, or if we do, it is certain we practise as if we did not; for whatever we pretend to believe about God's having predetermined and foreappointed all events that happen, yet this doth not hinder us from proposing several projects and designs to ourselves, and pursuing them

eagerly, and taking a great deal of pains for the bringing them about; so that at least both we and all mankind do practise as if we thought our endeavours might be available for the obtaining our ends, and that God's decrees were not all in all.

But, secondly, supposing God hath predetermined every event that comes to pass in the world, this doth not take away the necessity of prayer: I grant it gives it another kind of necessity than that we plead for; but still prayer there must be, in order to the obtaining benefits. For he that predestinated to the end must be supposed to have predestinated to the means too; and, consequently, if God hath decreed that we shall have this or the other thing that we want, he must have decreed likewise that we shall pray for it: (supposing that prayer be a means to obtain benefits, as we are assured it is:) and we shall, by the virtue of his decrees, as necessarily do the one (that is to say, pray) as obtain the other, (that is, his benefits.) It is true, prayer, upon this supposition, is no virtue; nor indeed is any action we do: but, however, it is necessary; and so the force of the objection is overthrown.

But, thirdly, which I desire may be well considered, the very ground of the objection is not so evident but it may be very justly called in question. It may very justly be doubted whether God's predestination doth extend to all things and events; that is, whether God from eternity decreed every particular that is done or comes to pass, so that it could not be done or come to pass otherwise than it doth: it is a great deal more probable that he did not; but that having created a sort of beings with thinking, rational souls, capable of acting freely, doing well or

doing ill, (of which kind we find ourselves to be,) he resolved to manage these beings in a way suitable to their own nature; that is to say, not necessarily to determine or tie up their choice or their actions, but to leave them to the use of their liberty, so that they might choose or refuse to act this way or the other, or not act at all; and accordingly, as they used this liberty well or ill, so to reward or punish them. It is true, he foresaw whatever would come to pass, and therefore hath made such provision that, let what will come, all shall at last be to the glory of his goodness, and the benefit of the world; but he did not order or decree whatsoever was to come to pass. That which he decreed was, that if men did well improve those talents he gave them, and used those means he afforded them for being happy, (of which means prayer is one, and a chief one,) they should attain their end: if they did not, they should go without his blessing, and reap the fruits of their carelessness and folly in misery both here and hereafter. Taking now this to be the true state of the matter, all the difficulty concerning the needfulness or efficacy of prayer, or any other means, doth perfectly vanish; for we see from hence that it is absolutely necessary that we should pray, and use such other means as God hath appointed; and if we do use them, they will be available; if we do not, we shall suffer the consequences of our neglect.

But, in the fourth and last place, some would say further, that it is not so doubtful a matter whether that doctrine of God's decrees, as the objection represents it, be true or no; for it is certain that it is not true: for (say they) how can that be true which is attended with such a train of absurdities and blas-

phemy, as no man of sense or religion can possibly own? If it be admitted that God did from eternity decree every event and every action that ever came to pass or was done in the world, and that they could not come to pass or be done otherwise than they were, what will be the consequences thereof, but such as these; that the holy blessed God is the direct cause and the author of all the sins and wickednesses and villainies that ever were committed, and of all the misery and calamities that ever were suffered in the world; that no man is to be commended or praised, or to be reproved and found fault with, for any thing that he doth; that there never are nor can be any such things as virtue and vice, any such things as rewards or punishments among men: which are positions so blasphemous, so destructive of all religion, nay, of all human society, that none can think of them without horror.

But I proceed to the fourth and last objection that is brought against the efficacy of prayer, and it is urged by another sort of men, and goes upon another hypothesis. It is of those that hold the necessity of all events upon mechanical principles. They believe the world to be a great machine, and whatsoever comes to pass therein is the effect of those fixed and unalterable laws of motion which are established in it, so that whatsoever happens among mankind hath a natural and a necessary cause to produce it; and therefore, however in common speech we call those things that are grateful to us the blessings of God, or if they be grievous to us, we call them the punishments of God for our sins, yet they do and must happen promiscuously and indifferently to the good and to the bad: and therefore to what

purpose is it to pray for the obtaining good things, or removing evil things from us, unless we can suppose that by our prayers we can stop the course of nature, or prevail with God to stop it for our sakes?

This is the objection; and two things I have to say in answer to it.

First, though it should be granted that all outward events owe their production immediately to outward and necessary causes, and that God doth not interpose in the hindering or furthering of them, but leaves second causes to work according to their nature; yet there is one whole kind of things, and those too that either are or ought to be the great matter of our prayers, that the objection doth not at all reach to; that is to say, those that we call *spiritual things;* such are, not only the pardon of our sins, and the favour of God, but all the perfections and accomplishments of our minds, wisdom and virtue and holiness, and the consequence thereof, eternal life. These, I hope, cannot be called the results of necessary outward things, but are the effects of God's grace and our own endeavours. These therefore, I hope it will be allowed, we may reasonably and with assurance of success pray for, notwithstanding any thing said in the objection to the contrary; because for the attainment of these things we must be immediately obliged to the divine assistance, which cannot be had without prayer; prayer being the same thing for the attaining this assistance and influence, that opening our eyes is for the receiving the light of the sun. Spiritual things then we may and must pray for; that is the first thing.

But, secondly, even for the outward events that come to us in this world, such as health or sickness,

poverty or riches, peace or war, good or bad weather, plenty or scarcity, and all the other good or evil circumstances of life, though it be acknowledged that all these have natural causes, yet they have not such natural causes as are necessary ones: they come to us in a natural way, but they do not come to us in such a necessary, unavoidable way as the objection supposeth. For here is the thing; granting that God Almighty, in his government of the world, doth not usually step out into extraordinary actions beyond or above the course of nature, yet he hath so contrived the course of nature, that such events, as we speak of, may be hindered or may be forwarded, may come to pass or may not come to pass, may happen this way or may happen another way, as men behave themselves towards God, and as he sees best for them; and this without any violence done to nature, or without transgressing the laws of it: so that there is room enough, abundantly enough, left both for our endeavours and our prayers; and accordingly as we use them or not use them, so shall the success and the event prove. It is a great mistake to think that the affairs of this outward world are managed wholly by mechanical powers, or, which is the same thing, by necessary causes; nay, the wills and the actions of mankind have a mighty influence upon them, as is visible in most of these things I mentioned; such as health and sickness, riches and poverty, peace and war, victories and overthrows, and other such like; and nobody, I hope, will say that the actions of men are necessary. But, besides, the angels and separate spirits, who are in great numbers every where, and are the invisible ministers of God's providence; they likewise have a

mighty efficacy in producing the events that come to pass in the world; for they have not only an influence over the actions of mankind, by suggesting to their minds upon such and such occasions a thousand things that perhaps they would otherwise never have thought on, but they have also a mighty influence over those powers of nature that seem to act most necessarily; I mean the elements, as we call them, from whose various combinations arise storms and tempests, fruitful or barren seasons, sickly or healthful years. Both these causes, I say, (the free as well as the necessary agents of this world,) these invisible ministers of God, so dispose and direct and order, as that they shall produce such events as God sees fittest for mankind, whether it be by way of judgment, as a punishment for their sins, or by way of mercy, as a testimony of God's acceptance of them; and all this too comes to pass in a natural way, that is, in the common and usual method of God's providence in the government of the world: but then, I add further, whenever there happens a just occasion for God to exert his extraordinary power above or against the course of nature, he will not fail to do that likewise: and abundance of instances of that in his government of the world he hath given us, and, for any thing I know, doth yet give us.

These things considered, we have no reason to imagine, that because things are commonly dispensed to us by the ministry of second causes, of which we can give some natural account, that therefore God had no hand in bringing such things to pass in the world, but that they come fortuitously or necessarily, and cannot be hindered or forwarded by the prayers and endeavours of mankind. No, certainly, though

the effect, whatsoever it was, was produced immediately by second causes, yet it was God that, by the ministry of his providence, laid the train of these causes, and so ordered and managed them as that righteous and good ends should be served by the effects that they produced; so that, as our blessed Saviour hath told us, *not so much as a sparrow doth fall to the ground*, but that it may be truly said, *it is by the will of our heavenly Father.* Every event that comes upon us is from him; and, if it be beneficial to us, it is and ought to be accounted a blessing of his, let it come what way it will, whether by seeming chance, or our own industry, or the help of friends.

On the other side, whatever comes cross to us, his hand is even in that also; that is, so far as to suffer it to fall upon us as a punishment for our sins, and a means to awaken us to our duty. From whence it follows, that it is so far from being needless and impertinent to pray unto God for the things of this present life, as the objection would conclude, that, on the contrary, it is absolutely necessary, in order to our well-being; for God being the sole Governor of the world, and the absolute Disposer of all events, however they be administered by second causes, it would be absurd not to depend upon him, and to pray to him continually for every good thing we want or desire, or for the removal of every evil thing that lies upon us.

Thus have I gone through all the objections that are made against prayer; and I hope I have given such full answers to them, that all of you will join with me in this conclusion, namely, that notwithstanding any thing that is urged in any of them, we

not only may, but we ought to adhere to these rules and precepts which are so often pressed upon us by Christ and his apostles; that is to say, that we should *always pray and not faint;* that we should *ask that we may receive;* that we should *seek that we may find;* that we should *knock that it may be opened unto us;* that we should *pray without ceasing, pray continually;* that we should every where *lift up holy hands*, and *watch unto prayer* with all perseverance; and, lastly, that we should *be careful for nothing, but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving still make our requests known unto God.* Sure I am, all those that have ever seriously and heartily, for any competent time, applied themselves to this practice, will bear testimony that these things are not in vain, but that they produce real effects; that besides the comfort and satisfaction that is reaped by these exercises, and which is inexpressibly greater than any enjoyment of this world can afford us, there is a real blessing that does attend them, and that all good men's prayers are answered effectually, if not always in the particular manner they pray for, yet in mercies and blessings and benefits that are much more useful for them, and more befitting their circumstances. Nay, I doubt not to affirm, that it is as much by our prayers as by any other endeavour, that not only particular persons and families, but also cities and states and kingdoms are preserved and supported.

And so much for this argument. *Consider what you have heard, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.*

A SERMON

ON

1 TIMOTHY II. 1, 2.

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority.

THE design of this Epistle is to give instructions to Timothy how he ought to execute the episcopal office which was committed to him in the church of Ephesus: and the first injunction that is given him about that matter is, that he should order public *supplications, and prayers, and intercessions, and thanksgivings to be made for all men; for kings, and all that are in authority.* I say, that he should order these things publicly to be done; for that these words are to be expounded of the public devotions of the church was never doubted that I know of; and may be fully made good from what follows after in this chapter.

But how comes the apostle here to make a difference between prayers, and supplications, and those other things? Why, certainly, his design was to make a just enumeration of all those offices or parts, of which the public worship or service of the church is to consist.

And those are four:

First of all, δεήσεις, which we here render *supplications*, but may more properly be rendered *deprecations*, that is to say, such prayers as we put up to God for the pardon of our sins, and the averting from

us all those evils that we deserve upon account of them.

Secondly, προσευχαὶ, or *petitions*, by which are meant those prayers we put up for all the spiritual and temporal blessings we stand in need of.

Thirdly, ἐντεύξεις, or *intercessions*, by which are meant those prayers that we are to put up for other men.

And, lastly, εὐχαριστίαι, or *giving of thanks*, which every body knows to be meant of that tribute of praise and thanksgiving we owe to God Almighty for all his mercies and benefits both to ourselves and others.

Of these four things, according to St. Paul, ought the public liturgy of the church to be made up. And that service, where any one of them is wanting, must consequently be defective.

But this is not the point I mean now to dwell upon; that which lies uppermost in my text, and most obvious to be observed from it, are these three things; which I shall therefore make the heads of my following discourse.

First of all, in general, the obligation that is upon us to have public prayers, and to resort to them. *I exhort first that supplications and prayers be made.*

Secondly, More particularly the obligation that is upon us, in our addresses to God, to pray for others. *I exhort that supplications, and prayers, and intercessions be made for all men.*

Thirdly, (which more immediately concerns us on this day,) the obligation that is upon us to pray and give thanks for kings especially; and that follows in the next verse, *for kings, and all that are in au-*

thority; that under them we may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty.

First, I begin with the duty of having and frequenting public prayers, which is here recommended to us.

It is the fault of a great many among us, and even of some that have otherwise a hearty sense of religion, that we do not set that esteem and value upon the public worship of God, that in the nature of the thing, and by the laws of Christ, it doth call for. If we do but say our prayers devoutly in our closets, (and I would to God that all of us did but that,) we think we have done enough: we have done all that is needful for the discharge of that part of our duty which concerns the worship of God. The church prayers we may spare well enough, and so likewise prayers in our family. And though we do perhaps now and then attend the public worship, yet it is not so much for the sake of the prayers, as for the curiosity of hearing a sermon, or it may be for the avoiding the scandal that our absence at such times would bring upon us: but certainly this is not a right notion of the worship of God; so far from that, that I must needs say, it is a very absurd one. We do readily own, that to serve God in private is a necessary duty; nay, so necessary, that there is no living a holy Christian life without it: we acknowledge likewise, that as the thing is infinitely reasonable in itself, so it is attended with manifold advantages of several sorts: but then we say, that public prayer, joining with our brethren in the service of God, whether it be at church, or in our own families, must needs have the preeminence in abundance of respects. Give me leave to name a few of

the many: Would we take the readiest course to have our prayers effectual, to obtain from God what we pray for? why, certainly, then we must pray with other devout people, that come together to obtain the very same thing that we desire. In common reason one would think that the united force of a number joining together, to make a request, should have more power than a petition from a single man, whoever the person be that is addressed to: but we have more cause to think so with reference to those prayers we make to God; Christ Jesus having given us his promise, *that wherever two or three of us are gathered together in his name, there he will be in the midst of us.* Not but that he will be present to every devout soul that prays as he should do; but the promise is more express to those that join their prayers together. Nay, our Saviour, even when the occasion led him to discourse of private prayer, such as ought to be performed in the closet, yet being to give a form of prayer, he delivers it in such words as are most proper to be used in a congregation, speaking in the plural number; *Our Father, which art in heaven, give us this day our daily bread; forgive us our trespasses;* and so on: intimating hereby, that it was his design that all his disciples should join their prayers together. But this is not all: Do we think it our duty to pay honour to God in our devotions, to give him the glory that is due unto his name? why, certainly, this is never so properly done, as when we assemble together with our fellow Christians to express our dependance upon him, and to set forth his praise. In true speaking, to give honour and glory to God is to publish to others the sense we have of his adorable

perfections, of his infinite kindness and benefits, and of the continual need we stand in of his bounty and influences; but this can no way be done so effectually as by joining in the expression of those things with the religious assemblies of our brethren. Nor indeed can we be more properly said to serve God by our devotions in private, than we can be said to honour him. And yet all of us think there is some service due from us to God, and we think likewise that we serve him by our prayers. This is so common and obvious a notion, that if a man do but hear the service of God mentioned, he is naturally apt to apply that word to praying to him, and worshipping of him, as looking upon that as the principal part of that service we owe to God. Why, this is true; but praying to God in private is doing him no service in the proper sense of the word; there we rather serve ourselves than God Almighty. To serve one is properly to promote the interest of that person whom we pretend to serve; to do his business with all those among whom we are employed. This now is truly and properly done, with respect to God, when we resort to the public assemblies to pay our devotions and acknowledgments to him; for by that means we really do our parts, that all the world should honour and fear and worship God as well as ourselves: nay, and contribute a great deal to the keeping up a sense of religion among men, which is the truest service we can pay to God. For were it not for the public, stated meetings for the worship of God, and the instructing men in the true religion out of the holy scriptures, not only the spirit of Christianity, but the very face of it, would be in danger to be lost in the world. But further, that I may yet

more recommend to you the use of public prayer, let me desire you to consider this: is it reasonable to worship God in a way suitable to our nature? If so, then we must certainly think ourselves obliged to assemble together for the celebrating his praises, and the putting up our joint petitions to him for the things we stand in need of. Man by his own nature is a sociable creature, and is so contrived that, in order to the serving his necessities, he must join in society with others of his own kind: and can it be thought reasonable to have society with one another in all other things pertaining to life, and yet to have no society with one another in matters of religion, which is certainly of higher concernment than any worldly affairs whatsoever? Is it necessary to our happiness that we should every day communicate together in our businesses, and in our enjoyments, and must we never communicate together in owning the Author of our society, the Head of our community, and paying our acknowledgments for the daily benefits we receive from him? For what did God Almighty give us speech? was it only for the transacting our temporal concerns one with another, and not rather for the setting forth the praises of our Maker, which is certainly the noblest use it can be put to? And yet that end of our speech would be wholly lost, if it were supposed that we were only to perform our devotions in private; for private devotions are as well performed with the mind as with the tongue. Add to this, that the most and the greatest benefits and blessings which we every day and hour enjoy, and do every day and hour stand in need of, are common benefits, in which we all have a share, as well as this or the

other particular person. Such are the air we breathe in, the food we eat, the light we see by, the peace and liberty and safety we enjoy; above all, the advantages of the gospel, and the promises of eternal salvation: these are public and common blessings; and therefore is it not infinitely reasonable that we should all join in public and common assemblies, to offer up our sacrifice of praise to God for these blessings, and to implore the continuance of them?

Once more, and I have done with this head. Have we ever seriously considered the nature of our religion, and the duties of our common Christianity? If we have, we must needs look upon ourselves to be indispensably obliged to frequent the public assemblies that are appointed for the Christian worship. It is a very false opinion that some people amongst us are apt to take up, that Christianity is no more than a sort of more refined philosophy, and that Christians are but a set of men that have truer notions about divine matters, and that therefore ought to live better than the rest of the world. It is enough, according to this account, to entitle any man to the name of a Christian that he doth believe the doctrines of Jesus Christ, and that he doth live a moral, virtuous life, though he exercises no acts that express his relation to that body or society which we call the church. But certainly this is a great mistake: for when Christ came to plant his religion in the world, and by the means of that to bring us to everlasting happiness, his design was not only to give us such a system of doctrines to be believed, and precepts to be practised separately by every person, without relation to one another, but to mould and form all his disciples into

one common body or society, or, as we ordinarily express it, into one church; and, in order thereunto, he appointed that every one who would embrace his religion should be entered into that church or society by baptism; and, when they were so entered, they should continue to exercise all acts of membership and communion with that society. And, that they might be the more effectually obliged to this, he appointed that the ordinary means, or conduits, or channels, in which he did convey his grace and Spirit to believers, should be this exercise of communion with his church; the joining in her public prayers and sacraments: so that if we would partake of the divine influences which Christ hath purchased, and without which we cannot expect to perform the terms required to our salvation, there is a necessity we should be members of his church. And if we be members of his church, there is a necessity likewise we should perform those acts by which that membership is expressed; and the chiefest of those acts are to meet together for the profession of our faith in Christ, for the worshipping God by prayer and thanksgiving, and for the receiving the holy sacrament.

Nay, I may add further, Christ hath so strictly combined all his disciples in a church or society, and so indispensably tied all that believe in him to join in the public duties of religion as members of that society, that it is in virtue of the relation we have to that society, and our willingness to join in those duties, that God accepts even our private prayers and devotions; so that if we voluntarily cut off ourselves from communion with Christ's church, and refuse to join in the public service of God with

other Christians, we have no reasonable grounds to expect that God will have any regard to the petitions we put up in our closets.

These things that I have now said may be, I hope, of some force, to convince us of the great reason, nay, of the great necessity that is upon us, not to make a slight business of the public service of the church, but to attend it both seriously and constantly, as we have opportunity. Sure, after what has been said, none of us will think it an indifferent matter, whether we be present at the public prayers, or whether we be absent. No; if we have any regard to the honour of God, if we have any regard to our own benefit, if we have any regard to the duties which either natural religion or Christianity doth oblige us to, we shall think ourselves obliged to be very diligent and very constant in attending the public service of God. And if our circumstances be such, that either we have not opportunity of resorting to it, or if, having opportunities, our other necessary business and way of living will not allow us to attend it; yet in that case these considerations will oblige us to take care that the worship of God be daily performed in our families. If we can no more than one day in the week be present at the public assemblies, yet we should every day in the week join with the catholic church in our own families, in offering up the solemn sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving for ourselves and all others. In this case every master of a family is allowed to be a priest, or he may depute that office to whom he pleaseth; but if no care be taken of the worship of God in families, especially where they are not allowed, or have not opportunity to resort to the public

prayers, I must confess I think the master of that family has no great sense of God and religion, and has a severe account to make for the trust committed to him.

But I leave this head of the public service in general, and come, in the second place, to that part of it upon which more particular stress is laid in the text, and that is, intercession for others: *Let prayers, and supplications, and intercessions be made for all men.* This was the apostle's order, and accordingly it has been practised in the church ever since, a very considerable part of the public devotions of Christians being always made up of intercessions for others; and thus it is likewise in our Liturgy, which in this respect, as well as others, is conformable to the ancient liturgies of the church.

I desire to insist a little on this point likewise, because I fear we are often apt to be too cold and unconcerned in this part of our daily prayers, not praying with the same fervour and attention in those offices that concern others, as we do in those that concern ourselves; whereas certainly it is both our duty and our interest so to do. For let us consider: most of those prayers we make for others are such wherein we ourselves have a great concernment; that is to say, it is to our benefit if they be granted, and we ourselves are likely to suffer if they be not: such are all the intercessions in our Liturgy that are made for public persons, kings, and governors, magistrates, ministers, and the like. In the happiness and prosperity of all these, and in God's blessing and directing them in their several offices, we have so great a share, (whether we look upon ourselves as members of the nation or of the church,)

that we are not kind to ourselves, if we do not most earnestly and affectionately join in the prayers that are put up to God for them. And then as for those other intercessions of our Liturgy which do not seem so immediately to affect us as those I have been speaking of, namely, such prayers as are made for all sorts of private persons, and under any necessity, spiritual or temporal, even our enemies; I say, even as to these, we have the greatest reason and the greatest obligation to bear a solemn and a serious part in them. For is it for nothing that God has joined us together in one common body? Is it not for this, that when any one of the members suffers, all the rest should be affected? Would not we ourselves desire most heartily that others should help and assist us all the ways they can, when we are in any extremity, and stand in need of their assistance? And is it not reasonable we should do the same for them? and can we assist them at an easier or cheaper rate than to put up our prayers for them? And yet, as easy and as cheap a way as this is, it is perhaps as truly beneficial to them, supposing we pray with fervour and devotion, as if our good-will was shewed in a more laborious or expensive instance.

It is the complaint of a great many, that they would do good if they knew how, but that they are not in circumstances, or they want opportunities of serving the public, or doing acts of charity. But let no man pretend this; for every person may truly serve every other person; may do good, express his charity to all the world, and to every individual in it, by heartily joining with the church in her intercessions for them. This is an opportunity we all of

us have; nor is there any in such poor circumstances but may do as much good this way as the richest, the greatest, and the ablest man.

But it will be said, Do we by our prayers really benefit those we pray for? Do they receive any advantage from hence? I answer, We do certainly by our prayers both benefit others and ourselves too: ourselves we do certainly benefit; for whether God thinks fit or no to answer the prayers we put up to him for others in the same way that we do desire, (as sometimes we may pray for things that God judgeth not expedient to be granted, and sometimes those whom we pray for do not their parts towards the obtaining of the things we desire for them,) yet certainly whatever we pray for of this kind is for our great benefit. We shall not lose the reward of our charity; that kindness and love and compassion we express for others shall not go unrewarded; but God will, with advantage, return into our bosoms the good wishes and prayers we make for them. But then as for the benefits that those we pray for receive from our intercession, I doubt not, but that they likewise are very great; I doubt not, but that both the public and every private man among us doth fare much better in all respects for the prayers that the church puts up for them; I doubt not, but that kingdoms and states are preserved and supported as much by the prayers of the good, as by the counsel of the wise or the valour of the mighty. And as for our private, personal concerns, I should think that man made a sorry bargain, that would forego his title to and his interest in the prayers of the church for any worldly good whatsoever. The truth of the matter is, God is, in his own nature,

infinitely willing and ready to bestow upon us all things that are needful to us; but he hath made our prayers also to be a necessary condition for the obtaining those things; and having formed us into a church, and made us one body, of which our Lord Jesus is the head, he hath further made our joint prayers, our supplicating and petitioning in a body, to be necessary for the obtaining the mercies and blessings which are needful, either to the church in general, or any member of it in particular. So that, as God hath ordered the disposal and distribution of his favours, every one of us both stands in need of other people's intercessions for the obtaining the things we want, and is also indebted to these intercessions of others, when we receive the things we prayed for: so that there is both a necessity that other people should continually pray for us, and that we should also continually pray for them. Sure I am St. Paul is of this mind, for as he was a most zealous intercessor himself for others, and a most zealous recommender of that practice to all those that he wrote to, so he also sufficiently declares how much he himself stood in need of other people's prayers: though he was an apostle and an inspired man, nay, a particular favourite of Heaven, and consequently might be presumed to have as much power with God upon his own single account as any man whatsoever, yet he frequently begs of the church that they would be earnest in prayer to God for him: *I beseech you, brethren,* (saith he to the Romans, ch. xv.) *I beseech you for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.* And again, to the Corinthians, *You also helping*

together by prayer for us, that for the gifts bestowed upon us, by the means of many persons, thanks may be given by many on our behalf. Where he plainly declares, that the grace bestowed upon him was to be accounted the effect of the church prayers, and as such it ought to be a matter of their thanksgiving. Lastly, saith he, in the fourth of the Colossians, *Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgivings, withal praying for us also,* &c. You see how solicitous and concerned the apostle was to have the benefit of the church prayers; and if such a man as he could be supposed to need them or to desire them, how much more must we be supposed to do both! and consequently how much more are we concerned in the duty here recommended to us of making *supplications, and prayers, and intercessions, and thanksgivings, for all men; for kings and all that are in authority!*

And that leads me to my third and last head.

Prayer and intercession, you see, *are to be made for all men.* But then the apostle adds, *for kings, and all that are in authority:* which is as much as if he had said, It is our duty to pray and give thanks for all men, but more particularly and especially for kings, and all that are in authority. And certainly there is great reason for this, that, above all other persons in the world, kings, and princes, and governors should have daily prayers offered up to God for them; not only because we owe most to them, as being obliged to them under God for the peace and quietness and security we enjoy in the possession of our just rights, and therefore we must be presumed, in point of gratitude, to think ourselves obliged to pray for them; not only because they most need our

prayers, as having of all other persons the most difficult and intricate post to manage, and being to combat with the greatest temptations of all sorts; which if we do well consider, we should want common humanity, if we were not so far concerned for them, as most heartily to put up our prayers to God on their behalf, to assist and direct them. But also in this other respect, which comes nearer to us, and which I touched on before, namely, the influence that their actions and successes have upon the whole body of men under their charge. The good or evil fortune that happens to princes is of an universal concernment: we do all of us partake in the happiness or in the disasters of their government: they cannot do amiss, but it some way or other affects the community; and we private persons feel the consequences of their miscarriages. As, on the other side, their happiness and prosperity, their virtue and goodness, their attending to wise and sober counsels, their love of piety and encouragement of the true religion, are public blessings: every person among us has a share in the benefits of them; so that by praying most earnestly for them, for their wealth and happiness, for their advancement and increase of true wisdom and piety, we do in effect pray for the same blessings to be derived upon our country. In praying for their welfare, both spiritual and temporal, we do in consequence pray for the good of all our neighbours, our relations, our families, whose happiness is wrapt up in their good government, and doth in a great measure depend upon it.

And the same reasons that oblige us to pray for kings will oblige us to give thanks for them also; which is the other thing we are to consider in this last

part of the apostle's charge, Let *intercessions and giving of thanks*, saith he, *be made for all men; for kings, and all that are in authority.* And this is our solemn business on this day, wherein we are met, according to the ancient and laudable custom of this and other nations, to celebrate the anniversary of her majesty's happy accession to the imperial throne of this kingdom. A blessing without doubt this is, though there was no more in it than the having a lawful sovereign quietly and peaceably succeed to the crown of her ancestors; I say, this very thing alone, though there was no regard had to other considerations, is, without doubt, a great blessing, and must be acknowledged to be so by all those that will compare the benefits and advantages we receive by a peaceable, uncontested succession to the government, with the horrible mischief and dismal consequences either of anarchy, or of a government not confirmed by the people, and therefore to be maintained by force and violence. And, in truth, when St. Paul gave this exhortation to *give thanks for kings, and those that were in authority*, the people to whom he wrote could have no greater inducement to put it in practice than this I have now mentioned; namely, that at that time they had a government peaceably settled amongst them, by which they were kept from confusion; and they had magistrates who took some care of property; but yet the supreme governor, the king at that time, was no other than Nero, as wicked and brutish a prince as ever sat on a throne; and those that had authority under him, the Roman governors, that were sent by him into the provinces, took generally more care of themselves than of the people committed to their

charge; and all of them to a man were opposers and persecutors of the Christian religion. Yet even at such a time, and in such a juncture as this, did the apostles order that *intercessions and thanksgivings for kings, and all in authority,* should be put into the public liturgies.

O how ought this consideration now to prevail with all Christians, most devoutly and cheerfully to offer up their prayers and thanksgivings to God for virtuous and good princes; princes that are in the same interests and of the same religion with their people; when, according to St. Paul's rule, they are bound to pray and give thanks for any prince, even such a prince as Nero! This will perhaps appear a hard saying to some; but it will be mollified, when we consider that there is a great difference between our prayers and between our thanksgivings for kings, as to the extensiveness of them, and the degree of fervour with which we put them up. We ought to pray for all our princes and governors, be they good or bad, with the heartiest zeal we can raise up ourselves to: but it is unreasonable, and in the nature of the thing it is impossible, that our thanks to God should be as zealous and as unreserved for a bad prince as for a good one. In the former case we can only thank God for the common benefits of government and civil society, that by his influence are continued to us; just as we thank God for the air we breathe in; though sometimes we may light into such an air as is not very wholesome; but yet, as bad as it is, we could not live without it. But in all other respects we can no otherwise thank God for a bad prince, than we can thank him for our misfortunes and afflictions and punishment: they are de-

signed for our good, and, if we make a right use of them, they will prove so; and even for this we have reason to return thanks unto God. But the case is infinitely different when it pleaseth God to bless a people with pious and wise and virtuous princes; here our thanks will be as enlarged and as unconfined as our prayers; but the pleasure and satisfaction we feel in our happy condition will raise us to greater degrees of fervency, both in the one and in the other.

Can there be a greater blessing to a nation (considering how much the fortune of the public and of every private person depends upon the qualifications of those that are to govern us; I say, can there be a greater blessing to a nation) than to have such princes placed upon the throne, (be they kings or queens, or bear they what style they will,) as are not only descended from ancient monarchs of the kingdom, but have also been always educated amongst their own people, and trained up from their infancy in the knowledge of the constitution, and in the profession of the religion established? Such princes, as in no time of their life have had any blemish cast upon them that could taint their reputation, even in a private condition: such princes as are not only zealous defendants and patrons of God's religion and God's church, by giving all countenance and encouragement both to the ministers and professors of it, but also by their own unblameable conversation, by their eminent piety and devotion, by the examples they give in their own persons of modesty, humility, and charity, and universal goodness, do recommend this religion and church to all about them: such princes as are careful ma-

nagers of the public revenue; not squandering it away in luxury and unnecessary pomps, nor hoarding it up to make themselves rich, but paying out of it to every one their just dues, and employing the rest upon the public service: such princes as are as tender and careful of their subjects' rights as of their own; nay, are more willing to recede from their own prerogative, than to do a hard or unacceptable thing to their people; so far from injuring their subjects in any respect, that they make it their business to oblige them all.

In a word, such princes as have nothing in their view, have no other design in the world but to be as good and to do as much good as they can.

Sure such princes as these, when God is pleased to bestow them upon a nation, and especially when they have this testimony from their people of the truth of this their character, namely, that whatever differences or disputes may happen amongst their subjects between themselves, they all agree in professing their love and honour and esteem of their prince; I say, sure such princes as these must be accounted rare and uncommon blessings, and accordingly all their people, that have any sense of God's mercies, will every day thank God for them.

As for us of this nation, I doubt not but we are all so sensible of the happiness we enjoy under her majesty's government, that there is no honest man in the kingdom (excepting perhaps some few that are carried away by new speculations in politics) but doth heartily join with us on this day, both in offering up our solemn thanksgivings to God for placing such a sovereign over us, and also in most earnest and affectionate prayers to him that he

would prosper the queen in her concerns; that he would direct and influence all her counsels, both public and private; that he would heal all our divisions, and unite the hearts of all her subjects; that he would give success to her arms by sea and land; that in her days religion and piety and righteousness may more and more flourish; and, lastly, that God would bless her with health and long life, even a life so long, that none of us here present may ever celebrate any other inauguration to the throne than what we do at this day.

May God Almighty accept the thanks and hear the prayers we now put up to him, for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. To whom, with the Father, &c.

A SERMON

ON

MATTHEW XXII. 35—40.

Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

THE Pharisees and Herodians, as we find in the 15th verse of this chapter, had taken counsel together how they might entrap our Saviour in his talk, and for that end they put several ensnaring questions to him. One was about paying tribute to Cæsar; another was about the resurrection: which questions they put so cunningly, that they believed it was impossible for our Saviour to answer them, but he must render himself obnoxious either to the government, or to one of the two parties that set upon him; but he avoided the snare by his prudent answer to their question. Now one that was there present, *a lawyer*, as he is called in the text, *a scribe*, as he is called in the parallel text of St. Mark, that is to say, one of the doctors or expositors of the Jewish law; I say, this man hearing Jesus's answers, and perceiving that *he had answered well*, as St. Mark tells us, he also thought fit to ask Jesus a question, *tempting him*, saith the text; that is, not with a

malicious mind, as the others did, but by way of trial of him, that he might make yet a further experiment of Jesus's wisdom and abilities, just as the queen of Sheba is said to tempt Solomon, when she put her questions to him.

The question which the lawyer asked was this;

Which was the greatest commandment in the law of Moses?

This question, it is likely, was one of those that were much agitated among the Jewish doctors at that time; some perhaps teaching that the law of circumcision was the great commandment; others, that the law of sacrifices was; others, that the moral duties of the law, those of loving God and our neighbour, were the greatest commandments: and of this opinion this lawyer himself was, as appears by St. Mark; and our Saviour did confirm him in his opinion; for his answer to the question was this, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments,* saith he, *hang all the law and the prophets.* That is to say, the foundation of all religion is first of all the love of God, and next to that the love of our neighbour: all the other duties prescribed either by Moses or the prophets, are summed up in these two, and may be reduced to them. He that saith, Love God and love your neighbour, doth in effect tell you your whole duty; for all other points of religion are comprehended and contained in these two. These are a summary of the whole law.

In treating on this argument, I shall first consider

that which our Saviour here calls *the first and great commandment*, and that is, *to love God with all our heart, and soul, and strength;* and secondly, afterwards, that which he calls *the next unto it*, and that is, the *loving our neighbours as ourselves.*

In speaking to the first point, I shall do these things:

First, Give some account what is meant by *loving God.*

Secondly, Shew in what respects or upon what grounds *this is the first and greatest of the commandments.*

Thirdly, Make some inferences from this doctrine.

Fourthly, Observe some practical cases about the love of God.

As to the first of these, what is meant by *loving God with all our hearts, and minds, and souls*, I need not speak many words; for nature must needs teach every one what this saying imports. It seems as impertinent to offer to instruct any body to know when they love another, as it is to give marks whereby they may know when they are hungry or thirsty: some things are more easily felt than they are described.

But yet, nevertheless, it is fit something should be said upon this head; and the rather, because I must confess there is some difference between divine and sensual love, the love of God and the love of the things of this world: the latter is usually accompanied with much greater passion and transports than the former; though yet the love of God, if it be sincere, will be as powerful, and produce as real and visible effects, as the love of any sensible object that is most dear to us in the world. But I would

not have any persons take measure of their love to God by what they feel in themselves, when they are carried out with some fervent passion towards some visible object: I would not have them think that they do not love God sincerely because they do not feel in themselves such violent transports and concussions of fear and hope, of desires and longings, of joy and delight, of impatience and restlessness, and the like, that perhaps they may have sometimes felt when their heart has been set upon some thing or person in the world. The love of God is not oftentimes so passionate and boisterous as the animal, sensual love; but yet it is always as real and permanent; it is as strong and effectual as the other, but more still and calm. And the reason is clear, because the seat of the one is in the intellectual, reasonable nature; the seat of the other is in the sensitive.

I doubt not indeed but that sometimes it comes to pass that the more ardently and intensely a man love God, the more will he draw his very animal passions to conspire with that love, and to shew themselves upon all occasions as vigorous in expressing it, as when they have a visible object to employ themselves about.

Holy David seems to have been a person thus affected: his love and devotion to God seems to have been accompanied with all the violences and raptures of passion that the highest sensual love can be. But this is a temper that is not always nor by all men to be expected; and therefore I am to give such an account of the loving of God as may be true, and yet be without that fervour of passion I have now spoken of.

Now four things I dare say every body will see to be necessarily required to the true, sincere love of God, even of those whose temper is least susceptible of passionate impressions.

Namely, first of all, that we have a great esteem of God. Secondly, that we have an earnest desire to be made partakers of his perfections. Thirdly, that we heartily endeavour to recommend ourselves to his favour by doing such things as are pleasing and acceptable to him. Fourthly, that we do so far dread his displeasure, that we would not for any worldly consideration incur it.

The first thing implied in the love of God is, a great and just esteem of him; that is to say, that we have such worthy apprehensions concerning God, and be so well persuaded of the adorable perfections of his nature, and withal of his infinite kindness and goodness and love to us, that we look upon him as incomparably the best, the most excellent, the most amiable Being in the world. Such is the contrivance of human nature, that we cannot love any thing that we have not first some understanding, some knowledge, some notion and apprehension of; and withal such an apprehension or notion as represents the thing to be lovely and desirable. Our opinion and fancy first leads the way, and then desire and affection followeth after: how is it possible a man should love that which he has no notion of; or, having a notion of it, how is it possible he should love it, when the notion of it speaks the thing to be unlovely? So that in order to our sincere loving of God, we must both acquaint ourselves with his nature, and likewise represent him to ourselves as the most amiable of all beings; and then we cannot for our hearts

keep our affections from running out after him. When once God appears to us what he really is in himself, the possessor of all perfections, the fountain of all good, the author of all that happiness that we either have or can hope for; when once we are heartily persuaded that every good, every desirable thing is in God in full perfection, and that all the excellencies we admire in this world, all the charming things that here attract our hearts, are all of them but so many rivulets derived from the inexhausted ocean of his perfections, but thin and scanty and imperfect emanations from his infinite fulness; that what is here most glorious, most beautiful, most rich, most delightful, is but a faint shadow, or copy, or representation of his eternal goodness, and glory, and beauty, and blessedness, when we have such apprehensions of his nature, as that we believe there is nothing frightful or unlovely in God; that *he is perfect light, and in him is no darkness at all;* (as the apostle speaks;) that he is such a Being as that all reasonable creatures that have any knowledge of him must needs love; and such a Being, that if it was possible to suppose there was not a God in the world, yet all wise and good men would most heartily wish that there were: and, lastly, when we have such an idea of God, as to look upon the enjoyment of him to be the supreme happiness we are capable of, and that in possessing him we are in effect put into the possession of every thing that is good, every thing that is desirable; all pleasure, and all riches, and all honour being bound up in his favour; he being at all times able to make his friends as great and as happy as he pleaseth, and never failing to make those happy that

love him: I say, when we have such just and right notions and apprehensions of God as these, then, and not till then, do we begin to love him; then will our souls cleave to him; then shall we cry out with David, *Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I can desire in comparison with thee!* so that the first step to, or the first expression of, love to God, is a just apprehension and esteem of him.

But, secondly, to love God implies an earnest desire of being made partakers of his perfections. It is an inseparable property of love, that it puts into the heart a strong desire and inclination to assimilate ourselves in all those qualities which we account amiable in the person beloved. It is nonsense to talk of loving and admiring a person for such and such accomplishments that he is possessed of, and yet at the same time to approve ourselves in such qualities as are directly contrary to them. If therefore we do sincerely love God, we shall certainly desire above all things to be made like unto him, to be united to him as much as we can, by possessing our minds and spirits with all those lovely qualities whereby we are capable of expressing his image and similitude. We shall so admire his wisdom, his purity, his justice, his mercy, his beneficence, his faithfulness and truth, that we shall look upon it as the greatest interest we have in the world to be made righteous as he is righteous, merciful as he is merciful, wise, and pure, and faithful, and true, as we find him to be. We shall look upon all sin and wickedness and impurity as the greatest blemishes and impurities, the greatest evils in the world. We shall not endure in ourselves any hu-

mour or quality, any habit or custom, that speaks opposition to his rectitude and goodness. We shall breathe after a participation of his nature; *we shall hunger and thirst after his righteousness;* we shall endeavour to bring our minds and spirits in all things to a conformity with those ideas which God in his holy word hath given us of himself; nay, so heartily shall we be in love with virtue and goodness, and all other qualities that accomplish our souls, and render us like unto our Maker, that if it was put to our choice, whether we would possess the whole world without them, or them without the conveniences of the world, we should certainly choose the latter.

From this will follow, in the third place, a serious care to approve and recommend ourselves to God in all our actions. As love doth naturally work towards the assimilating us in our natures and tempers to the person we love, so it will also put us upon the framing all our carriage and behaviour and conversation in such a way as we believe is pleasing and acceptable to the beloved object. Can we with any justice pretend that we love our friend, at the same time we make it our business, in his sight and presence, to do those things which we know he hates, and hath declared over and over again that he looks upon himself as affronted by the doing of them? This is our case with God Almighty. He is not indeed properly injured, or receives any damage by any thing we can do; for as our best services add nothing to his blessedness and glory, so neither do our worst actions detract any thing from it: but yet he hath declared that there are some sorts of actions that are highly pleasing and acceptable to

him; and, on the contrary, that others are very displeasing and unagreeable; and such as, if they be done, he looks upon as an affront and dishonour to him. And, that we might not be at a loss to distinguish between them, he hath given us his laws and commandments for the rule by which we are to govern our actions and conversation; which laws he hath partly writ in our hearts, and partly revealed to us in his holy word. Here, therefore, above all things, we must shew our love to God. We cannot pretend to love him, unless we do heartily and sincerely endeavour in all our actions to observe these laws: we cannot pretend to love him, (on the contrary we do plainly affront him,) if we willingly and knowingly allow ourselves in those actions that are plain transgressions of these laws.

Here then let us fix; whenever we are talking of our love to God, let us try it by this mark: do we sincerely endeavour to keep God's commandments? is it the study and design of our lives to frame our actions as near as we can to the rule that God hath given us to walk by? and do we constantly avoid, to the best of our power, the doing of that which we see and know is plainly repugnant to God's laws? This, I am sure, is every where in holy scripture represented both as the most proper expression, and the surest argument of our love to God. Thus God himself, in the second commandment, joins these two things together, as inseparable the one from another; for thus he speaks in the twentieth chapter of Exodus, *I will shew mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.* So that *loving God* and *keeping his commandments* are but two terms expressing the same thing; and

thus again our Saviour more expressly in the fourteenth of St. John, *He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me:* and again, *Ye are then my friends* (that is, *Ye do then truly bear affection to me*) *if ye do whatsoever I command you:* and, lastly, St. John in his First Epistle, *Whoso keepeth his word, in him is the love of God perfected;* that is to say, he both truly loves God, and loves him in perfection, as far as the state of human nature in this world is capable.

It was very well becoming the wisdom and goodness of God, and exceedingly for our benefit and comfort, that the Holy Spirit should in the scriptures thus plainly and fully declare what that is in which the love of God doth principally consist, and by what marks and characters we may truly know whether we love God or no. It is not so easy a matter for every body to know whether he hath that esteem and veneration of God, or whether he doth form such lovely ideas of him in his mind as he ought to do; (which is one of these instances or expressions I have mentioned of the love of God;) neither is it so easy a matter for a man to know whether he hath such ardent longings and breathings after a participation of the divine nature, as the sincere love of God will inspire a man with, (which was the other character I gave of it.) But every man may know whether in his life and conversation he doth sincerely endeavour to observe God's laws, whether he doth really frame his life so as to study to perform those things which God hath commanded, and to avoid those things which God hath forbidden: this, I say, every body may know and find out, by examining the principles upon which his ac-

tions turn, the designs by which they are managed; and therefore this is a mark by which every man, even the plainest and the dullest, may know whether he sincerely loves God or no.

Let us all therefore stick to this mark; let us take this both for the truest expression of our love to God, and the best evidence we can give ourselves of it. Let none of us judge of ourselves by the warmth and fervour we do sometimes feel in our minds towards God; let us not upon any account that we have now and then very devout affections, that we can pray with great earnestness and vigour, that we feel a great joy and delight in our spiritual exercises, that we are sometimes raised up above ourselves in our contemplations and devotions; I say, let none of us upon this account be too forward to conclude that we sincerely love God. For if this zeal and heat of affection be not accompanied with a steady, constant endeavour to recommend ourselves to God by an uniform obedience to all his commandments, it will signify nothing. And, on the other side, let none of us that are dull and flat in our prayers, that feel none of those raptures and spiritual consolations, and that lively communion with God, that other men talk of; that have none of those ardours and flames of love, none of that transport and exaltation of spirit in their holy offices; but go on in a dull, insipid road of duties, (as they are apt to fancy it;) I say, let none of those upon these accounts be in the least troubled or cast down, as if they had not the true love of God within them. For those very people, in as low a dispensation as they think themselves to be, if they be so wrought upon by the motives of the gospel, that they do unfeignedly set themselves to

live honestly and virtuously and godly in their whole conversation, they have assuredly the love of God abiding in them.

In a word, let all sorts of men, how brisk or how dull soever their passions and affections are toward God, judge of their state and condition by this: Do they heartily and steadily endeavour to approve themselves to God by an innocent and virtuous and religious course of life? Do they make a conscience of keeping all God's commandments as far as they know them, and as far as they are able to keep them? Do they indulge themselves willingly and knowingly in no action, or in no course of life, that their consciences tell them is displeasing to God? If they can satisfy themselves that they do this, they have all the reason in the world to be assured that they love God in that degree that he will accept; and that whether they have or have not the comfort of it here, they will certainly have the reward of it hereafter.

But, fourthly and lastly, there is one thing more to be added to the full explication of this precept in my text besides what I have said; and that is, that the love of God we are speaking of implies such a degree of intenseness, as that whoever pretends to love God must have so great a regard to the favour of God, and so great a dread of his displeasure, that he would not for any consideration in the world run the hazard of forfeiting the one, or incurring the other.

And this is that which I take to be the full meaning of that phrase, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.* It is an idle thing to go about to distinguish nicely about the sense of these several

words. This undoubtedly is the meaning of all: that we should cleave entirely to God with all the powers of our souls and bodies; we should endeavour to serve him with every faculty that he hath given us; we should not give up ourselves to him by halves, dividing ourselves between God and the world; but all other interests, all other considerations must yield, where God and our love to him are concerned.

The plain English of all is, that we must love God above all things; that we must mind his service above all other concernments; that we must preserve our duty to him entire and inviolable, whatever come of our other affairs. And if it should so happen that our worldly profit, or pleasures, or interests, are inconsistent with our love to God, we must quit them all, rather than depart from the laws of our heavenly Father.

And this is that which our Saviour hath told us in the tenth of St. Matthew, (with which I conclude this point and this Discourse,) *He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.* Or, as he expresseth, Luke xiv. 26. *If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and his mother, his wife, and children, brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.* Not that a man ought to hate any of these; but he ought to love them all less than Jesus Christ: he ought to postpone them; he ought to slight and forsake and abandon them, whenever he cannot keep them, and preserve his love, his duty, his fidelity to God. Thus much for this time.

" O God, who hast prepared for them that love
" thee, such good things as pass man's understand-
" ing; pour into our hearts such love towards thee,
" that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain
" thy promise, which exceeds all that we can desire,
" through Jesus Christ our Lord." To whom, &c.

A SERMON

ON

MATTHEW XXII. 37—40.

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

I BEGUN to treat on this text the last Lord's day, and the method I proposed was,

First, To give some account what is meant by *loving God with all our heart, and soul, and mind.*

Secondly, To shew in what respects, or upon what grounds, this love of God is *the first and greatest of the commandments.*

Thirdly, To make some inferences from this proposition of our Saviour, that *to love God with all the heart and soul is the first and greatest of the commandments.*

Fourthly, To observe some practical case about the love of God.

As to the first of these points, what it is to *love God with all our hearts, and souls, and minds;* I shewed you that it must necessarily comprise in it these four things:

First, That we have a great and just esteem of God.

Secondly, That we have an earnest desire to be made partakers of his perfections.

Thirdly, That we heartily endeavour to recommend ourselves to his favour, by doing such things as are pleasing and acceptable to him.

Fourthly, That we so far dread his displeasure, that we would not for any worldly consideration incur it.

On these things I dwelt the last Lord's day, and therefore shall not now enlarge upon them, but proceed to the second general point of my proposed method, and that is, to shew in what respect, or upon what accounts, this precept of *loving God* is *the first and greatest commandment.*

Now, I say, it is so, and must be accounted so, for these following reasons:

First of all, in regard that in the order of nature it is before the other commandments, and is, as it were, the foundation of them.

The other duties of the law are built and grounded upon this, and do derive their obligation from it. For instance, the duty we owe to our neighbour, to be just and faithful in our dealings, to be merciful and charitable, to be quiet and peaceable, as likewise the duties we owe to ourselves, to be chaste and modest and temperate; these are acknowledged to be necessary, indispensable precepts. But now from whence doth our obligation to them arise? How comes it that they do bind our consciences to the performance of them? Is it because they are things reasonable in themselves, and agreeable to the frame of human nature? or is it because the practice of these things is the natural means to make our lives more easy and comfortable in this world? Why, I grant that both these things are true, and both of them are likewise considerable

motives to engage us to the practice of them; but yet, in strict speaking, neither of them is sufficient to lay a direct obligation upon our consciences to the practising of them without something else, and that is this: the authority of the great God, (whom we are all bound to *love and serve with all our hearts, with all our minds, and with all our strength,*) that hath made these things to be our duty, that hath prescribed it as a law to us, to be just and charitable, chaste and temperate, and the like: I say, it is this that layeth the direct obligation upon conscience; so that were we not bound in conscience to serve and love God, neither should we be bound in conscience to practise those other things.

The truth is, were there no God in the world whom we were bound to love and serve, there would be no such things as love and conscience in the world: it is the consideration of God in the action that makes any action to be religious or irreligious; and it is the consideration of God's authority that makes any thing to be a duty in point of conscience, or to be a sin against conscience: and therefore, since to love and cleave to God is the first duty, and that which gives the stamp of conscience and religion to all the rest, it must needs be *the first and greatest of all the commandments.*

Secondly, this law of *loving God with all our hearts and souls* is the greatest of all the rest in regard to its excellency and dignity, because it employeth and exercises the powers of our souls in the highest and noblest operations, and about the best object they are capable of. To love God is certainly the highest perfection and accomplishment of

human nature; for hereby we are made like unto God; we are made partakers of his divine nature; for *God is love:* as we are men, the perfection and happiness of our nature consist in the improvement of those two faculties, our understandings and our wills. The understanding is improved and perfected by the knowledge and contemplation of the best objects; the will is improved and perfected by love and adhesion to the best objects. Now, though it be true that the knowledge of God and his perfections (which is transcendently the best and noblest object in the world) is absolutely necessary to the perfection and happiness of our natures; for if we had no knowledge of him, it is impossible we should love him; yet it is the loving of God, the admiring and adoring his infinite goodness, the being firmly united to him in our wills and affections; it is this that makes us truly perfect and truly blessed: for if we knew and understood never so much of God and his perfections, yet, if we did not bear goodwill and affection to him, if we were not by love transformed into his spirit and temper, we should, for all this knowledge and understanding, be still but in the rank of devils; to whom it is rather a torment than a happiness that they know so much of the infinite goodness that is in God, when their wills and affections, their nature and inclination, are at so great a distance from him.

In a word, the blessedness of mankind consists in the divine life; and the very root of the divine life is the sincere love of God. Whoever truly loves God cannot but be happy, because he hath the nature of God in him; and whoever doth not love God cannot but be miserable, because he is at the

greatest distance from the greatest good. To love God is to be really put into a possession of all that God himself can bestow: for it engages all his wisdom and power, his care and providence for our benefits; all security and welfare, all rest and peace, all joy and delight and comfort, do attend upon it. And therefore, since the love of God is the sum of our happiness, it must in reason be accounted the sum of our religion too; *the first and greatest of all the commandments,* as our Saviour here expresseth it.

But, thirdly, it must needs also be so in another respect, or upon another consideration, and that is this; that it is our hearty love of God that gives worth and value to all our other religious performances; it is upon account of that, that God has any regard, or sets any esteem upon our other duties. No sacrifice, as one expresseth it, is acceptable, which is not kindled by this heavenly fire; no offering sweet and pure, which is not seasoned by this holy salt. Love doth of itself recommend us to our heavenly Father; but our other performances do not so, but upon love's account; they are more or less acceptable, according as they more or less proceed from, or are accompanied with, love and affection to him.

It is natural to think this, because all mankind proceed by the same measures in judging of the actions that are done unto themselves. Let one be never so civil to us, make never so great profession of serving us, be never so prodigal of his bows and cringes, of fair words and compliments; nay, though he do us some real favours and courtesies, and presents us with gifts that are in themselves valuable;

yet if in the mean time we know that this pretended humble servant hath all this while no real kindness for us in his heart, and that all this obliging carriage and behaviour doth not in the least proceed from any respect to us, but merely to serve himself upon us, do we in that case value the civilities that are done us? do we think ourselves obliged to the man for them? So far from that, that we are apt to despise both him and them. Whereas, on the other side, every ingenuous man will take kindly whatsoever is said or done to him, when he knows it proceeds from real good-will. Love, though from never so mean a person, is a present for the greatest and highest upon earth, and procures the acceptance of every thing it brings along with it. Nay, the very slips and offences and miscarriages that others are guilty of towards us, if they proceeded from love, if there was no bad meaning in them, but the man intended kindly to us, though it was his misfortune to be mistaken; I say, even these, if they be not accepted with favour, yet will obtain an easy pardon, even from the most inexorable natures.

And certainly thus also we must needs apprehend the case to stand between God Almighty and ourselves. We cannot reasonably imagine that any service we offer to him, though it be in those instances that he hath strictly enjoined and commanded, will find his acceptance any further than it proceeds from hearty good-will, and from a soul that values his favour, and really sets itself to please him. To think to recommend ourselves to God by our prayers or our fasting, by our devout discourse, or by our attendance on his worship; nay, even by our moral honesty, and our acts of mercy and charity,

which are the most valuable sacrifices; when at the same time God sees and knows that our hearts are not right to him, that we have no true love to him, nor any real affection to his commandments; but do these things either for vainglory, *to be seen of men*, that we may get a reputation of sanctity; or for the pleasing of others, to whom, by these ways, we hope to recommend ourselves. Or, lastly, for the serving any by-end or selfish design, which we think by these methods may be promoted; I say, for any man to think that these kind of services will be acceptable to God, is the greatest nonsense in the world. So far is he from looking kindly and favourably upon such kind of performances, that our Saviour calls such people by no better name than *hypocrites;* nay, tells them plainly, *they have their reward;* that is to say, their serving their own worldly ends being the business they aimed at, it is enough if they gain that; other rewards they are not to expect from God Almighty.

But, on the other side, whosoever heartily loves God, and endeavours in all his actions to approve himself to him; such a man never fails of God's acceptance, in every instance of duty that he applies himself to. Every service that he offers is kindly taken, and the more it expresseth his sincere love, still the more value doth God set upon it. Nay, our very failings, and infirmities, and miscarriages, so long as there is this principle of love in our hearts, will find his pity and compassion, but not his anger. In a word, it is love that sanctifies all the actions of our duty, and makes them of *a sweet-smelling savour to God;* and it is love that will be the best cover, and make the best apology, for the worst of

our errors: and therefore, since it is of such mighty worth and value with God, as that upon account of it all other duties do receive their estimation, great reason had our Saviour to affirm it *the first and great commandment.*

But, fourthly and lastly, *to love God with all our hearts, and souls, and minds, is the first and great commandment,* in regard of the universal influence and efficacy it hath to put us upon observing all God's commandments. Such is the force and power of love, that wherever it gets possession, it brings all the powers of the soul and body into a compliance with the will of the beloved, in all the instances wherein that will hath declared itself. So that we can no sooner think what it is that God would have us to do in any instance, or how it is that he would have us behave ourselves in any emergency; but, if we sincerely love him, we shall readily put ourselves in a posture of obeying him.

Fear may go a great way towards the deterring men from some practices, and at some seasons; but when the fright is over, the man naturally returns to his former inclinations and habits. But love is a principle that changes the bent and temper of the mind, and by a gentle and easy violence (if it be proper to speak so) carries us on to a cheerful and steady and uniform obedience to every thing that we think is pleasing and acceptable to God. *If any man love me,* saith our Saviour, *he will keep my words;* it is impossible he should do otherwise: if we can once bring ourselves to love God, it is needless to bid us to be kind to our brethren, to be sincere and honest in our dealings, to abstain from whoredom and drunkenness, and all such impurities;

to take all opportunities of worshipping God, and offering up our prayers and thanksgivings to him, both in public and private. For these actions will come of course, because we know that it is such things as these, that God, whom we love, takes pleasure in, and hath required of us. Nay, though any of the commandments should at the first appearance seem hard and severe to flesh and blood, yet the true love of God will easily surmount these hardships. Nothing will be difficult to him that sincerely loves. When Jacob had served Laban seven years for his daughter, and in that service had underwent as many labours and difficulties as can easily be supposed, yet the text tells, *that these years seemed to him but a very few days, for the love he bare unto her.* It is the property of love to think nothing grievous or painful that leads to the obtaining of what we desire; or that recommends us to the person that is the object of our love. And if love be thus powerful when it is placed upon earthly objects, where the attractions are so small, and where oftentimes blind passion is interested more than reason; O how powerful must it be, when it is placed upon the most charming and lovely and glorious object in the whole world! and where true understanding and reason doth so fully and entirely close with that object, that with its utmost force and vigour it recommends it to all the inferior faculties, and sets them on work in the pursuit of it.

Since therefore the love of God is of such universal influence, and is so necessarily productive of obedience to all the holy commandments, we must needs be convinced that it is what our Saviour here

styles it, *the first and great commandment*, and unto which all other commandments are to be reduced.

And thus much let it suffice to have spoken on my second general head. I now proceed to the third, which is, to draw some inferences, or to make some application of this doctrine.

Our Saviour here tells us, that *to love God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, is the first and great commandment*, and in conjunction with the second, (that *of loving our neighbour as ourselves*,) it makes up the whole *law, and the prophets;* is in effect the summary of both, there being no other duty there commanded, but what may be reducible to one of these two heads.

The first thing I would take occasion to observe from hence is this: that *religion*, (taking that word as it signifies that universal duty we owe to God, and by which we are to recommend ourselves to his favour,) I say, that religion is not so variable, uncertain, and arbitrary a matter as some men do perhaps suppose it, but is a constant, fixed, permanent, immutable thing; the same now that it was in the days of the old law; and the same then that it was in the days before the law was given; and the same, both then and now, that it shall be a thousand years hence, if the world should last so long. True religion, and that which is from God, was, and is, and ever will be the same in substance in all countries, and in all nations, and among all sorts and conditions of men whatsoever; and the sum of it is, *to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and with all our minds, and with all our strength;* and, next to that, *to love our neighbour*

as ourselves. This was the religion that the patriarchs and all the pious men of old lived in, and by which they obtained God's favour and acceptance, when as yet there was no revealed, instituted religion in the world. And this, as our Saviour tells us, was the sum of that religion which God, when he thought fit to make known his will by revelation, gave to the Israelites by Moses, and which he continued by a perpetual succession of prophets to press upon them; and lastly, that this likewise is the sum of that religion which hath Jesus Christ for its author, and who was the last and the greatest prophet that came to declare God's will to mankind, and whose religion is to continue in force for ever; I say, that this is the sum of the Christian religion no man can in the least doubt, that hath ever read the New Testament. If our Saviour could truly say, that the sum of the Jewish religion, as it was delivered by Moses and the prophets, did consist in those two things, the love of God and of our neighbour, I am sure we have much greater reason to say, that the religion that he taught may be summed up in these two duties: for, in the Jewish law, there were a great many precepts that were about matters of an indifferent nature, and seem wholly foreign, and no way to look towards this business of loving God and our neighbour; but, in our Saviour's institution, there is hardly any one thing recommended to us that doth not directly relate to this matter; that is not either an instance wherein we are to express our love to God and our neighbour, or a means whereby we may be furthered in the practising of those duties, or an argument and motive and encouragement to excite us to the practising of them.

It is the design of all his doctrines to give us right notions of God and our neighbour, to teach us how excellent, how good God is in himself, and how kind, how gracious to us; and, therefore, what infinite reason we have to love and serve him, and to love and serve all mankind (who are our neighbours) for his sake; it is the design of his precepts to give us rules in what manner and in what degree we are to express our love to God and our neighbour, and to oblige us, under the highest penalty, not to fail in our duty in these matters; it is the design of his promises to encourage us in the constant and sincere performance of these duties, notwithstanding whatever temptations we meet with to the contrary, by offering to us greater assistances for the performance of them, and proposing greater rewards to the performance of them than mankind had ever yet heard of: and lastly, it was the design of his whole life and conversation in the world, to give us a true pattern and example of love to God and man, in all the several instances wherein it will be our duty to express it.

Love therefore, as it was the sum of the old law, so it is likewise the sum of the new; or, as St. Paul expresses it, τὸ τέλος τῆς παραγγέλιας, it is *the end*, the perfection, the utmost design of the evangelical dispensation, to teach us *to love* (namely, to love God first, and then our neighbour) *out of a pure heart, and good conscience, and faith unfeigned*, as you have it, 1 Tim. i. 5; so that, putting all this together, we have an easy and a true notion of that religion which is from God, and we can never be at a loss to find out in what it doth consist; it is not a thing to be altered at pleasure; both the law of na-

ture and the law of God, both the natural dispensation, under which all men are born, and the revealed dispensation, as we have it either in the Old or New Testament, do sufficiently instruct us in the main heads of it: nay, I dare be bold to say, so long as mankind do retain their nature, and are not transformed into another sort of creatures than what God made them at first, it is impossible that there should be any true religion but what may be summed up in these two things, namely, to love God and our neighbour.

There is this difference indeed between the three dispensations, that of nature, that of Moses, and that of Christ, as to this matter; that the first teacheth these duties very imperfectly. Mankind, through the universal corruption and degeneracy of the world, having lost the true notions of God, and of the way wherein he would be loved and served; and it was the design of the second dispensation, that of Moses, to restore and revive these notions among the Jews, and to oblige them more strictly to the performance of those duties by more explicit promises and threatenings; but yet this dispensation of Moses was very imperfect, and very insufficient for the bringing all mankind to that pure love of God and man that was required to the perfection of human nature, and therefore, *when the fulness of time was come, God sent his own Son, our Lord Jesus, into the world*, not to alter the principles of mankind, or to set up a religion that was never heard of in the world, but to perfect what was deficient in the law of nature or in the law of Moses; to build upon and to improve the old foundation of loving God and our neighbour, that so all mankind might

be put into a capacity of performing acceptable services to God, and arriving to that perfection and happiness which in their creation they were designed for. This work, I say, our Saviour undertook; and this work he did effectually perform and execute: first, by instructing mankind more plainly and perfectly than ever they were instructed before, how, and in what instances, they were to express their love to God and man; secondly, by requiring of them a greater measure, or degree, or intenseness of love both to God and man, than mankind had hitherto thought themselves obliged to; thirdly, by laying before them a great many new arguments and motives and inducements, to the practice of those duties which they hardly ever thought on before; fourthly, by procuring greater aids and helps, and assistances for the performance of this duty than ever was afforded under either of the other dispensations; fifthly, by setting a plain and easy, but withal a perfect example, in his own life, of the practice of these duties in all the several instances of them; sixthly, by proposing greater rewards to all good men, that would sincerely endeavour to recommend themselves by universal love to God and man, than either the light of nature or the law of Moses did make over; and, lastly, by purchasing remission of sins by his death and passion, for the encouragement of all mankind to set themselves to the practice of this true religion, how faulty or negligent soever they had before been in these matters.

This now to me seems a true scheme and a genuine representation of the Christian religion. As to the main duties required in it, it seems to be the same in substance both with natural religion and

the religion of the Jews; and the sum of them lies in this, *to love God with all our heart, and to love our neighbour as ourselves;* though, both as to the instances of expressing these duties, and the strictness with which it requires them, and the arguments it gives for the engaging us to them, and the assistances it offers for the performing of them, and the unvaluable promises it makes to all that sincerely lay out themselves in them; I say, in all these respects, there is no comparison to be made between Christ's religion and the other, Christianity having incomparably the advantage, upon every one of these accounts, both of the heathen and the Jewish religion.

But this is that which I aimed at, and all that I desire to observe at this time, that religion is not a fictitious or arbitrary thing; one thing to-day, and another to-morrow; one thing in this kingdom, and another in a distant region; but the true religion, the religion which is of God, is eternally the same, and consists in this which I have so often repeated, *That we love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our mind, and with all our soul; and that we love our neighbour as ourselves.* And thus much of my first inference.

Several other observations I have to draw from this text, but they will furnish matter for my next Discourse; and therefore I here break off, desiring God to give a blessing to what hath been said.

Now to God the Father, &c.

A SERMON

ON

MATTHEW XXII. 37, 38.

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.

I HAVE in two former Discourses shewed you both what it is to *love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and mind;* and, secondly, that this is indeed *the first and greatest of all the commandments.*

The business I am now upon is to make some application, to draw some inferences from this point, and one of them I mentioned and insisted upon the last Lord's day.

I proceed now to a second inference from this point, and it is this: Is it the first and principal part of our duty to love God, and afterwards to love our neighbour? then we may learn from hence how preposterous those men's notions are, who place the sum of religion in the performance of those duties we owe to ourselves, but lay but very little or no stress on those that properly and immediately concern God. There are some among us that pretend to own religion, but place it in a great measure, if not altogether, in the practice of that which they call *moral honesty*, without any regard to the love of God in their mind, or expressing their sense and veneration of him in their actions. It is enough, in their

opinions, to secure all the interest of their souls, that they are men of honour and justice, that they are fair and gentle in their dealings, or that they are true to their words, civil to their friends, kind to relations; that they scorn to do any base or infamous action; that they do to all men as they desire to be done to themselves; and, lastly, that they are not scandalously lewd, or debauched, or profligate in their conversation; but then as for the duties of piety, properly so called, such as hearty faith in Jesus Christ, love and trust and dependance upon God, devoting themselves to the service of him and Christ, and expressing their sense and dependance on him by prayers and thanksgivings, and other acts of worship; all this they are perfect strangers to. They maintain no communion with God in their closet, nor is there any face of Divine worship appears in their family. They do not much resort to the holy assemblies at the accustomed times, and when they do, it is rather to comply with the custom, or to gratify some piece of curiosity, than for any ends of devotion; and as for the most solemn part of the Christian worship, that of commemorating the death of our Lord in the holy sacrament, they have never any thing to do with it, unless perhaps they have some secular turn to be served by their coming thither.

But what shall I say of this sort of men? We dare not indeed call them atheists, because they pretend to believe a God, and they pretend likewise to live soberly and honestly, as being God's commandment: but we can in no sense call them Christians. For if it should prove that they believe in Jesus Christ, (which whether they do or no, we know not,) yet they are far from living like his disciples. Nay, we

may truly say, that however they may own both God and Christ in notion and opinion, yet really they deny both in their actions and conversation; and may be truly said *to live without God in the world.* So that, in truth, it is but in a very improper sense that they can be said to have any religion at all.

The very life and soul and spirit of all religion, as I have often said, is to love God with all our heart and mind. This is the principal part of it; nay, this is the very sum of it. But now these men have a religion without the love of God; that is to say, they are religious without having that wherein religion chiefly consists. But it will be said, Are not honesty and justice and regularity of life, are not these instances and expressions of love to God? Right; they are so, when they proceed from a good principle; when they flow from such a lively sense of God, and hearty affection to him, and serious desire of recommending ourselves to his favour, that we do sincerely endeavour to put in practice every thing and all things that we know he hath commanded; among the which we are deservedly to account acts of justice, and mercy, and sobriety, and generosity, and the like; I say, when such actions proceed from this principle they are really instances and expressions of our love to God; but without this principle they are not at all. Otherwise we must say that a perfect atheist does express his love to God when he practises these things, (as certainly such a man may live in the practice of all these things,) when yet he doth not believe that there is any God at all.

But now if a man has this principle of the love of God within him, if he do his actions out of the power and influence of that, it is certain he cannot rest in

such performances as these. That principle will carry him a great deal further, and will put him upon doing a great many other things besides these: more especially it is impossible it should suffer him to live in a constant neglect of those duties that do more immediately and directly concern God himself. It is a vain thing for any man to pretend to love God that never worships him, or but very rarely; nay, that is not frequent in the performances of his divine offices, and that too out of conscience. It is impossible we should persuade ourselves that we love God when we find in ourselves no affections to him, no desires after him, but our hearts are quite dead as to all the things whereby communion between him and us is maintained; when we can live day after day without reflecting on his benefits to us, or our own miscarriages towards him. If we did truly love God, we should have a hearty sense of his power, his wisdom, his justice, and his providence. We should feelingly own our continual dependance on him, our infinite obligations to him, and the hourly needs we stand in of his mercy and bounty. We should ardently desire to have his favour, to be at peace and friendship with him, to have him for our guide and protector in all the stages of our life, and especially that he would vouchsafe us the continual assistance of his grace, that we may not in any instance start aside from our duty, nor fail at last of safely arriving to his glorious kingdom.

Now, I say, wherever a man feels this sense, these desires, these breathings after God and goodness, he cannot for his heart avoid the expressing of them in a constant and serious devotion. He will pray to God in private, he will pray to him in public, he will

exercise acts of repentance for his former follies and sins, and over and over again renew his vows and purposes of better obedience; he will shew that he entirely depends upon God, by returning the most hearty thanks and acknowledgments for every good thing he receives, and begging of him the supplies of what he needs; he will most seriously and importunately, both in his closet and in the congregation, recommend to his heavenly Father the care both of himself, and of all that he loves in this world, imploring the continuance of his mercies, both private and public; and that he would avert the judgment and punishment which he and all of us have deserved by our manifold transgressions and provocations. Above all, he will make his most earnest supplications at the throne of grace, that neither he nor any other devout soul may ever want the help and assistance of God's grace and Spirit to conduct them, in the fear and love of God, through all the varieties and vicissitudes of the temptations of this world. All these, I say, are the natural and necessary fruits and effects of love to God wherever it is entertained in any man's heart, and therefore, let men pretend what they will, if they can live without praying or worshipping God, it is certain they have not the love of God in them.

And the same thing we say as to the business of professing our faith in Christ Jesus, owning his revelations, believing his doctrines, and communicating in his sacraments, and giving up ourselves to him as our Lord, our Priest, our Saviour. These are indeed things that are but of small consideration, and very lightly regarded by such persons as I before spoke of. For, as they have laid the scheme of reli-

gion, the natural indispensable duties of morality are all in all; but for faith in Christ, and relying upon him for salvation, and the like, you must excuse them, if they have no great regard for those matters. But this also, I say, doth certainly proceed from, and is an undeniable argument of their being devoid of the love of God, and consequently of their wanting the main, essential part of true religion: for it is obvious to every one, that among the expressions of our love to God, this must eternally be one, and a principal one; namely, that we do heartily and readily close with all those methods that he hath proposed and declared for the bringing us into favour and reconciliation with himself; that we should joyfully embrace all those directions and instructions that he hath been pleased to afford us for the walking acceptably before him.

Though, therefore, (as I observed before,) the whole of our religion (our Christian religion, I speak as to the duties required of us in it) is comprehended in these two things, the love of God and of our neighbour; yet this very first duty (the love of God) doth likewise include in it a hearty belief of, and a firm adhesion to the doctrine and revelation of our blessed Saviour, as to all the parts of it: for supposing that God sent him into the world out of pure kindness to us, to help our ignorance, and to strengthen our weakness, and to heal our sicknesses, by teaching us how we ought to love and serve God, by encouraging us in that service with the most forcible arguments, and the most glorious promises; and, lastly, by laying down his life to obtain a pardon of our sins, and rising again from the dead, that we might have peace and strong consolation in our own

minds, through the hopes of another life; I say, supposing that all this is done for us by our Saviour, (as we are sure it is,) will not the love of God constrain us in this case, with our whole hearts, to embrace this kind Messenger, and this kind message from God to our souls? Will it not be joyful news to every soul that loves God, to hear of such a Saviour, such a Mediator? Or can any such forbear to thank God most affectionately, for this wonderful condescension of his in sending his own Son among us? Can they forbear to yield the most firm belief, to give the most hearty entertainment to every thing that this Son of his doth deliver as the will of God? O, certainly, all that love God must needs be filled with inexpressible joy and satisfaction for this unspeakable grace and favour to us, and must so entirely, with heart and mind, give into this new dispensation that Christ hath set on foot, as with the most fervent zeal to list themselves among the number of his disciples, with the greatest sincerity to embrace all his doctrines, to study and inquire into his revelations, to meditate on his arguments, to comfort themselves with his promises, to instruct themselves fully in the duties he hath obliged them to; to set themselves cheerfully and vigorously, with all their might, to the practising of them: and, lastly, to resolve to own him and his religion, to trust in him, and to depend upon him as their Lord, their Saviour, their Redeemer, to the last breath of their lives. All this now every one that sincerely loves God will most naturally and necessarily do, supposing that the gospel of Christ be proposed to them, I will not say, with that fulness and clearness and evidence which God at first gave, but

even with that degree of evidence that every thinking, considering man among us may have at this day.

Away therefore with that religion which consists only in the outward practices of that which we call *moral honesty:* there is no heart nor life in it; it is a religion without the sincere love of God: for wherever that takes place, it will so entirely possess our minds with the sense of what we owe to him and our Lord Jesus, that it will be the delight of our lives, and the greatest joy of our hearts, to enjoy communion with both in all the instances of piety and devotion which our Saviour hath recommended in the gospel. The true love of God will make us both devout in the way that nature teacheth, and also in the way that Jesus Christ hath taught us in the New Testament.

But I proceed, in the third place, to another inference from my text; and that is this: since the great precept, both of the law and the gospel, is, that we should *love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind;* since, I say, *this is the first and great commandment,* then we may see what little countenance either the law or the gospel has given to the doctrines of merit, and works of supererogation, as they are taught in the church of Rome. It is one of their doctrines, that the good works of justified persons are truly meritorious of eternal life; so the council of Trent teacheth, and pronounceth an anathema against all such as deny it; or if ye will have it in the words of the Rhemish translators of the English Testament, take it thus: "Men's works," say they, "done by the grace of Christ, do condignly or wor-

" thily deserve eternal joy; so as works can be no " other but the value, desert, price, worth, and me- " rit of the same." Thus the Rhemish Testament.

They have also another doctrine, that a man may do good works more than he is bound to do, more than any precept of God doth require of him; and these they call works of perfection, or works of supererogation; and these, to be sure, are of all others most meritorious.

One would at first wonder for what reason these doctrines were set on foot, or what ends they served to; for that they do not any way minister to the promoting true piety is visible enough, because the direct tendency of them is rather to puff up men's minds, and to fill them with presumption and self-confidence; to make them proud and vain and assuming; which are qualities very different from those that our Saviour seems to have recommended to us; and the wonder will still increase, to consider how they have applied these doctrines, and to what a degree they have extended them; for it is a current, received maxim among them, that a man may not only merit for himself, but for other folks; and that if any man have suffered more than he deserved, or hath done more good works than he was obliged to, all those merits that he obtains hereby, over and above what is needful for the satisfying for himself, are not lost, but may be communicated to others that want them, and shall really be available to their good to whom they are thus communicated. I say, one that looks no further than the business of virtue and piety would be apt to wonder much at this strange opinion: but then when we are once let into the secrets of these doctrines, and come to

know the true use they are put to, we shall not be much surprised at them. For here lies the thing: every man being thus capable of meriting in his works, and merits being thus transferable and communicable to others, here is a plausible foundation laid for a fund or stock of merits in the church; which fund or stock is to be in the keeping and disposal of the chief pastor; and out of this fund or stock he may supply every one's necessities, that hath no merits of his own, by his indulgencies; and the effect of these indulgencies is, that they do redeem out of purgatory: so that purgatory brought in indulgencies, as they are now used; and, for the support of indulgencies, these doctrines of merits and works of supererogation were contrived.

But now let us a little look into this doctrine of merits and supererogation, and examine it by my text. Our Saviour's speech that we are now upon doth imply, that it is our duty *to love God with all our hearts, and souls, and minds,* and *to love our neighbour as ourselves;* for he saith it is a commandment, nay, and *the first and great commandment.*

I desire now to know how a man can be strictly and properly said to merit any thing by doing that which is his duty to do; much more how he can be said to earn or merit such a reward by doing his duty, as doth amount to a thousand times more in worth and value than his duty comes to? I pray let this be reconciled to the common principles of reason. We own indeed that a man by doing his duty hath acted like an honest man: but nobody thinks that he merits any thing thereby, much less that he truly merits eternal life thereby, as the council of

Trent determines. Will any man say, that because a debtor pays the hundred pounds that he hath given his bond for, that therefore he merits of his creditor? why, he owed it him, and had been unjust if he had not paid it him; but there are no thanks due to him for it. Well, but suppose this was a disputable point; nay, suppose, if you will, that there were some thanks due to him; yet will any man be so senseless as to say, that because the debtor pays the hundred pounds according to his bond, that therefore the creditor is in justice bound to give him a thousand pounds for the paying that hundred which then it was his duty to pay? And yet this is the case between God Almighty and us. We owe to him, as our Saviour here tells us, *all the love, all the service,* and, consequently, all the good works we can do in our whole life. It is a duty indispensably incumbent upon us *to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and souls, and minds;* and we are false and unfaithful stewards of his benefits if we do not. But now, how we come to oblige God Almighty by this, nay, so far oblige him, that he should be bound in strict justice, for the little service we have done him, to bestow eternal life and glory upon us; (which is ten thousand times of more value than the service of our whole life, had it been never so exact and perfect, could amount to, or could pretend to;) I say, how this should come to pass, or what reason there is in it, I am sure no man living can give an account of. Well, but there is an answer to this. It will be said, that we do not so much pretend to merit by those good works that we are strictly and indispensably obliged to, as by those good works we are not obliged to. If we perform

services to God more than we are strictly bound to, more than he hath required of us, these sure may plead some merit, though strict duties may not. As for instance, two men may be both supposed to live innocently and virtuously and Christianly, and both of them at last go to heaven; but one of them doth much exceed the other in devotion and prayers, in fastings and austerities, in alms and charity: both did what they were bound to; but one of them did more than he was bound to: both observed the precepts of the gospel; but one of them went beyond that, and proceeded even to the observance of the evangelical counsels, the rules of perfection: and here it is that the foundation of merits is to be laid. And this is indeed the full strength of what can be said for works of supererogation. But to this I answer, the distinction here between doing our duty and doing more than our duty; between evangelical precepts and evangelical counsels, is vain and idle. For I would ask this question: are these extraordinary performances that we are not bound to, these that you call evangelical counsels, or directions to perfection, but not strict precepts; I say, are these true instances or expressions of our love to God, or of our love to our neighbour, or are they not? If you will say they are not, how can they recommend us to God? What reason hath he to be pleased with them, or to take any notice of them? You may as well say, that to sit down and say over the letters of the alphabet a hundred times a day, or to go about the streets and count all the signs between the one end of the city and the other; I say, you may as well imagine that these works are meritorious, as that the other are, whatsoever they be, supposing

they be not instances and expressions of our love to God; and therefore, certainly there can be no merit or supererogation in works of that nature.

Well, but you will say, these works you talk of are really instances and expressions of your love to God; you fast so often for God's sake; you go so many pilgrimages for God's sake; you say so many prayers more than you are obliged to for God's sake; you renounce the world, and vow a perpetual poverty, for God's sake: all these things you do out of the pure love of God; yet every one of these things is more than you are in duty bound to by the laws of Christianity. Why, all this seems very well, but yet it will be spoiled by asking one question more, and that is this: Do you think you can love God more than you can do? Do you think you can do things to please him more than it is in your power to do? If you say you cannot, (as indeed all men in their wits must acknowledge, for no man can do more than he can do,) then all these fine things are come to nothing; for you were bound to do, for the love of God, all these things that you have now talked of; (supposing, indeed, that they did really recommend us to God, and were such expressions of our love as he delights in, which for my part I shall never believe of them;) I say, you were bound to do all these things, because you are bound *to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.* It is your indispensable duty; nay, as our Saviour tells you, it *is the first and great commandment.* Now if you can do more than all this amounts to for the expressing your love to God, I will yield that you may do more than God requires of you, and consequently may merit something from

him. But till you can love God more than with *all your heart, and soul, and strength*, I am sure you cannot do any thing for the expressing your love to God, which it is not your duty to do; and if it be your duty to do it, where are your works of supererogation?

This, I think, is enough to have said in confutation of these absurd opinions, though abundance more might be offered to shew how reasonable they are. But my text hath led me thus far, and I will not go further than it leads me, especially upon so invidious an argument.

As for us, let us all endeavour to love God, and to serve him with all our hearts, in all those instances which he hath recommended to us by our Lord Jesus. Let us do our duty to him and to our neighbour as well as we can; and, when we have done our best, let us earnestly beg of him to forgive us our failings, to pardon our infirmities, to pass by all the slips and faults and miscarriages we have been guilty of towards him. I am sure all of us, even the best of us, do need his pardon; nay, do need it every day. Nor have we any other merits to plead but those of Christ Jesus. Nay, though we could be so happy as to live without sin in this world, and to do our whole duty, yet still we merit nothing from God's hands, still we have no way in the world obliged him; still the case between God and us is but the same as it is between the master and the servant in our Saviour's parable, with which I shall conclude, because indeed it is the sum of all that I have said, and may serve for a recapitulation of my whole discourse upon this point.

You may find it in the seventeenth chapter of St. Luke's gospel, and the 7th verse; *Which of you*, saith

he, *having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that thing which was our duty to do.* Thus far our Saviour. From whence we may gather, that those that do all these things which God hath commanded them are but *unprofitable servants;* and therefore how unprofitable must they be, that do not an hundredth part of that which God hath commanded us! And yet I doubt this is the case of even good people among us. May God forgive the best of us all our neglects and miscarriages, and inspire us both with power and will to serve him better; and this for the only merits of his dear Son Jesus Christ. To whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, &c.

A SERMON

ON

MATTHEW XXII. 37—40.

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

THE method I have proposed in treating of this text was,

First, To explain the duty here commanded, that is to say, what is implied in *loving God with all our hearts and souls.*

Secondly, To shew upon what accounts this may be truly said to be *the first and great commandment.*

Thirdly, To make some application of this doctrine, by drawing some useful inferences from it. And,

Fourthly, To speak to some practical case about *loving God with all our hearts.*

Three of these heads I have already gone through in several Discourses: I now come to the fourth and last.

Now the case I have to speak to, concerning the love of God, is the case of those who, though they exercise devotion towards God, yet do it with great dulness and deadness of affection; whether these people can be said to love God with all their hearts and souls?

The case is this: prayer and devotion and the worship of God, are (we know) the most proper in-

stances and expressions of our love to him; and it is readily acknowledged on all hands, that those persons who do not practise these things, who can live without praying and worshipping God, have no true love of God in them. But now what shall be said of those persons that do indeed say their prayers, and that perhaps both in public and private, but yet they say them without any vigour or life, their affections are dead and flat in these holy exercises, they find no relish nor sweetness in them? Other people talk of a great pleasure and delight they take in these duties, and look upon it as a most agreeable employment to sing praises to God, and to pour out their souls in most fervent devotion to him; but they take no satisfaction in these kind of things. On the contrary, it is with great reluctancy oftentimes that they can obtain of themselves to engage in these exercises, and while they are engaged, their minds are often employed about other things, and glad they are when they come to the end of their offices. What now shall we say to these persons? Is such a temper as this consistent with that sincere love of God, and that hearty sense of religion that is required of us? This is the case: but as thus generally put, it cannot be answered by a single yea or no. It may so happen that a man that truly loves God may be in this dull dispensation, though it doth more often happen that this frame and disposition of mind is an effect of lukewarmness. We must therefore take into consideration several other circumstances in the persons concerned, before a right judgment can be made of their case. That which I can say about it I shall reduce into these propositions; and,

First of all, as it is certain that no man can be said

to love God, or to have any sense of religion, who lives in a general neglect of prayer, and other exercises of devotion; so it is likewise certain that, generally speaking, all men that do sincerely love God, supposing they be in health, and free from the disorders that arise from hypochondriac melancholy, will find their affection so carried out after God, that they will with great vigour, and the utmost intenseness of mind, perform their devotions to him; nay, they will take a great pleasure and delight in so doing. Not that they think God needs our services, or is any way better by them; but because they know and feel that they themselves are really better by thus lifting up their souls to God; by adoring his excellencies, and setting forth his praises; by meditating on his goodness, and paying their acknowledgments; by devoting themselves to his service, and recommending the supply of all their wants to his fatherly care and bounty. These being the proper methods of growing and improving in all virtue and holiness, the natural expressions of the sense we have of God, and the love we bear to him, and the chief, if not the only means of maintaining and enjoying a real communion with him; upon these accounts, as they will take all opportunities that their time and business allows them of approaching to God both in public and private, so they will do it cheerfully and readily, and their hearts and minds will go along with the service. And so far will they be from looking upon it as a burden or imposition, thus to pay their constant tribute of prayer and thanksgiving to God, that they will reap great satisfaction and content from so doing. This we say, generally speaking, will be the temper of those that truly love God.

But then, secondly, we say it is not to be expected, that even the most devout persons should at all times perform their offices of religion with equal fervour, or with equal attention, or with equal satisfaction: it will unavoidably happen, what through the weakness of human nature, or what through business or unthought-of accidents, or twenty other things which may distract the thoughts; and what through the dulness and unfitness of our present temper for the exercise of these spiritual employments; I say, it will unavoidably happen that even the most devout persons may be at some seasons very indisposed for devotion. And sometimes, when they apply themselves to the exercise of it, their minds shall be altogether so taken up and diverted by other objects, (that have got the present possession of their thoughts,) that they shall give little or no attention to what they are about; at other times, though they bend their minds as much as they can to the business they are doing, yet they shall find themselves very listless and cold and dull, and the whole performance will be very flat and insipid. At other times, it shall be even against the grain of their inclinations to say their prayers at all. There is no man so spiritual in this world, but he must expect now and then to suffer these inconveniences, even through the natural indisposition of his bodily temper, or through the distraction of his employments. It is a vain thing to talk of sitting so loose from this world, and having our affections so steadily placed upon God, that we shall be always in a praying frame. Human nature in this life will not bear it, and they will run themselves upon great hazards that do attempt it.

But then, here is the comfort against these inconveniences, that generally they do not last for any long time. If we be at the present indisposed for devotion, or dead and lifeless in the exercise of it, yet in a little time we shall come to ourselves again. The fervour of our desires and affections towards God will return, and we shall perform our religious offices with the same heart and life and vigour that we used to do.

But then, thirdly, you are to remember what I have now said only concerns those indispositions for devotion, which every man now and then, at this or the other time, may find in himself. But now whenever it happens that this dulness and listlessness, and unattentiveness to our devotions grows into a custom or habit, so that a man, generally speaking, performs them negligently and carelessly, and is hardly brought to them, and cares not how soon they are over; this is a bad sign, that the man either doth not love God so sincerely as he ought to do, (as not having that regard to his worship and service, which the true notion of the love of God will necessarily and indispensably put him upon,) or if he did once love God, it is an argument that his love wears off and decays apace, and if great care be not taken to retrieve the fervour of his devotion, it is in great danger of being quite lost and extinguished. It is the experience of all mankind, that hath ever made any trials in these matters, that so long as a man doth heartily set himself to serve God, and to keep up a lively sense of him in his mind, it is impossible for him so long to be negligent, or careless, or slight, or perfunctory in his devotions; he can as soon forbear eating heartily when he is

hungry, as forbear the refreshing and entertaining his soul by communion with God, in all the offices of hearty prayer and devotion, as his affairs will allow him, and he hath opportunities put into his hands. The sense that he has of God's presence and goodness, and of his own dependance upon him, and of the continual need he stands in of his gracious influences, will necessarily put him upon this. This, I say, will be the frame and temper of his soul, so long as the love of God is vigorous and powerful in him: but as that declines, as the fervour of his mind towards goodness and religion doth wear off, so in proportion will the fervour of his devotion wear off also. Every degree or step of advance which the Devil or the world doth make into his affections, will presently shew itself, by taking off so many degrees from the heartiness of his devotion; and just as worldly cares, and sensual pleasures, and an unconcernedness for his spiritual and eternal interests do prevail and get ground upon him, so he will grow more feeble and languid, more careless and unconcerned in the performance of his religious offices: they will be more tedious and irksome to him, and the less of his heart and soul will go along with them: and if it should happen that those enemies of God do get an entire victory over him, so as to obtain the full possession of his heart, from that time forwards he will have no devotion at all; but however he may approach to God with his lips, his heart will be far from him.

This, I say, the constant experience of all Christians doth always make good, and there is no doubt to be made of the truth of it: the more we love God, the more serious and cheerful we shall be in

our prayers, and other devout exercises; but as the love of God abates in us, so will our care and zeal about those things abate likewise: and when it comes to pass that we do not mind them, nor attend to them at all, and are unconcerned at ourselves that we are so regardless; though yet perhaps we have so much regard for our own old customs, or the fashion of other people, that we do not quite leave them off, or absent ourselves from them; I say, when things come once to that pass with us, it is a strong argument either that we never had the true love of God, or that we are fallen from it.

I desire seriously that all of you would consider this, because I do not know any one single thing by which you may more certainly make a judgment concerning your progress in religion, and the love of God, or great abatement and decay in it, than this thing I have now mentioned. I do not say but that there are many actions much worse in their consequences, or more destructive of salvation, than the neglect of your devotions is. I do believe that whoredom and drunkenness, that pride and malice and uncharitableness, that covetousness and extortion and unjust dealing, and the like, do involve any man, that is concerned in them, in a much greater guilt than the bare neglect of the worship of God at due times, or than the careless and negligent performance of it doth: neither do I say, that all persons that make a conscience of saying their prayers constantly, and oftentimes too do it heartily, that all such must of necessity be truly religious and hearty lovers of God: for I am convinced that people may go so far in religion as to make a conscience of worshipping God both in private and public, and yet, for all that,

be very unconscientious in their other actions: now I count, that if men's prayers and devotions have not that influence upon their spirits and lives, as to make them hate and avoid every thing that God hath declared against, and to put them upon the universal practice of purity, and humility, and meekness, and charity, and all other virtues which God hath recommended to us, it is not worth a rush, it shall never avail them to render them accepted of the great God, who is *the searcher of hearts:* far am I, therefore, from placing the whole or the greatest part of religion in this business of devotion; but this is that which I say, if ye do sincerely love God, and have a respect to his commandments, ye will know it by this, that your own hearts will strongly and powerfully incline you to be frequent and diligent in your applications to the throne of his grace. Ye shall not be able to pass a day without some act of communion with him, either in public or private, and, when ye come at the more solemn times, or in a more solemn manner, to appear before God, (as all Christians do on the Lord's day especially,) ye will have a very serious regard to what you are about; you will not endure it in yourselves to approach to the temple of God, and in order to the solemn worship of him, as idle, unconcerned hearers or spectators; but you will put out your whole strength and vigour in joining with every prayer, and every thanksgiving that is there offered up; and you will be so far from looking upon these exercises of religion as burdensome impositions, that you will really take delight in them, and account the day wherein you are thus employed as a good day to your souls: thus, I say, you will certainly be

affected, if your hearts be right towards God: but if ye find in yourselves that you have no relish of these kind of things; if you can either content yourselves to live without praying at all; or if, when you say your prayers in private, you can content yourselves with the mere saying of them, without any regard or concern whether God minds them or no, (as indeed there is little reason to think he should mind them, when you do not mind them yourselves,) and this not once or twice, but ordinarily and customarily; or when you come to worship God in the congregation, you come rather because you are used to come, than upon any serious design of recommending yourselves to God; and when you are there, you take so little notice of what ought to be your main business, that were it not that your eyes and your thoughts are employed upon other objects than what you come for there, you should think the whole service and attendance upon it to be a tedious, oppressive thing; I say, whenever you find your minds in this frame and disposition for any long time together, you may certainly conclude (whatever religion you pretend to) that you have no hearty love to God, nor his worship, nor his ways: or if you ever had any, it is strangely gone and dwindled away; and in case you do not take care, by a more hearty and serious exercise of devotion, to bring yourselves to a more divine and heavenly frame of soul, you are certainly but still in the rank of mere animal, sensual, carnal men, and all your profession to religion and the love of God will rather rise up in judgment against you, than be of any advantage to you.

But there is another case about dulness and flatness in devotion far different from that I have now

been speaking to, and which indeed the general question, as I put it in the beginning, hath reference to: this, therefore, I come, in the fourth place, to speak to.

Fourthly, Therefore I lay down this as a certain truth, that there are some people who may be very much indisposed for all religious offices, and find a great dulness and deadness of heart in the performance of them, and this too for a long time together, and yet for all that be true and sincere lovers of God, and very devout and religious persons. It is so far from being impossible, that it usually and frequently happens, that some persons who used to be very devout in their prayers and religious addresses, and took great delight in them; nay, and so fervent they were in those holy exercises, as to be raised up many pitches above their ordinary temper in their devotions, and to feel strange transports of love and joy and consolation, whilst they were thus employed; I say, it is no strange, unusual thing, to see these very persons flag and abate so much, as to their vigour and fervour of devotion, as hardly to be able to pray at all; and when they do force themselves to perform their usual offices, they do it with so much wandering of thought and distraction of mind, with so much languor and feebleness, and with so little comfort and satisfaction to their own minds, that they verily believe all their devotion is gone, all their love to God, which heretofore was the comfort of their lives, is quite extinguished. What now shall we say to these people? Shall we say that they have lost their first love? shall we say that they are fallen from all that sense of religion that they formerly had? Yes, we should say so, if their

decay in devotion did proceed from such causes as we spoke of in the last particular, if they were so careless and negligent and unconcerned about these matters, as those were we now represented; but we suppose the case to be quite otherwise with them; we suppose they have the same concern and respect for all God's commandments that ever they had; we suppose they hate every thing that is evil and wicked, and pursue every thing that is virtuous and praiseworthy, as much now as they did before; we suppose that they have the same desires, and the same affections towards God and his service, that they formerly felt in themselves, and that it is their great trouble and affliction, that they can pray and worship God no better: in a word, we suppose that they do as heartily wish and study and endeavour to recommend themselves to God, and to enjoy communion with him, as ever they did; but it is their misfortune that they cannot raise up their minds and affections to him in their prayers and other holy offices as they were wont to do: all their delight in those things is gone, all the sweetness and comfort that they used to find in the worship of God, whether in their closets, or in their families, or in the church, or at the Lord's table, is quite vanished and lost to them; and this is the thing that troubles them.

Why now, if this truly be the case of these persons, they need not trouble themselves at all; for I dare confidently say to them, that, notwithstanding all the deadness and dulness and flatness of their affections towards God in the performance of their religious duties, they are in a safe condition, and they do as truly love God with all their hearts and

souls as ever they did, only they do not enjoy so much the comfort and delight of it as they did before.

The truth is, all this dulness and flatness, and indisposition for devotion, is to be charged upon the ill habit of their bodies, rather than any vicious affections of their souls: if the temper of their bodies was but well set right, the good inclinations of their minds would presently return, and all the joys and satisfactions and comforts along with them: but now, how to do that, how to restore their natural tempers to their former briskness and vigour, is the work of another profession to direct, and not mine; only this it is proper for me to say upon this occasion, that as this dulness and heaviness and listlessness of spirit in the exercise of religious offices, doth, in such persons as I am speaking of, always proceed from an indisposition of body, and most commonly that indisposition proceeds from causes which they cannot prevent, and for the redress of which they must have recourse to the physicians; so sometimes it proceeds from such causes as they may prevent; and of those it is not out of my province to speak a little: I say then, that as to the keeping up in ourselves a constant briskness and cheerfulness and vigour, in the offices of our devotion, a great deal lies in the discreet and prudent management and conduct of ourselves as to this matter, and the contrary effects we complain of are often to be ascribed to our own imprudence and indiscretion. One point of this indiscretion is this, when we are too eagerly and violently bent upon our religious exercises, and do not give ourselves reasonable rest and intermission; we would have our bodies so perfectly at the com-

mand of our spirits, that, by our good-will, they should attend no other work but what serves to the promoting their ends. Some persons, especially young beginners in religion, are of this temper; they would be always praying or reading, or at least have their thoughts employed upon some serious or religious argument, and all that time that is not thus spent, is, in their account, spent vainly and unprofitably.

But whatever these persons think, this is never the way to subdue the flesh to the spirit; on the contrary, by this means they quite spoil the good habits of their bodies, on which their cheerful serving of God doth all in all depend, and the consequence hereof will be, that though perhaps they began very briskly, and found a great deal of peace and joy when they first entered upon the way of religion and devotion, yet if they use themselves at this rate for any long time, they will not hold out, but will miserably flag before they be half at the end of their journey: if therefore any one means to go on vigorously and cheerfully in the love of God, and avoid this dulness and flatness of affection that is here complained of, let him not harass his mind and his body with too constant seriousness and thoughtfulness, but let him unbend himself at due times, let him follow his worldly affairs and business with all cheerfulness, let him not think that he is always to be so intent upon the business of devotion, but that he may recreate and divert himself as other men do, and indulge his constitution in its innocent cravings.

But I need not insist upon this, because there are not many that stand in need of this sort of advice:

God knows, the most of us rather need spurs to quicken our endeavours and our diligence in the worship of God, than reins to hold us in. But there is another point of indiscretion in the conduct of ourselves, which I ought, upon this occasion, to caution against, because it often proves the cause of the decay of our briskness and vigour in the service of God, and makes religion and devotion very heavy and burdensome to those that use it, and that is, the too much tying up and fettering ourselves with rules and forms of our own making. As for instance, when we make resolutions to pray so often every day, and so long, and in such a form; to read so much of a good book, to forbear wholly the use of this or the other indifferent thing; not to give above such a portion of our time to our business, or to our company, or to our recreations, or the like. This exact methodizing of our actions and our devotions beforehand, though it be very lawful, and though we meet with it as recommended in many godly books, nay, and at some time it serves really to good purposes, yet it often proves a snare to him that thus ties up himself; (especially if he be a person of that temper we are now speaking of;) for though perhaps the rules we set ourselves were very prudent, and did exactly befit our circumstances at the time that we made them, yet if our temper or circumstances do alter, as they often do, they will cease to do so; and that which at first was both profitable and delightful will in time prove not only inconvenient, but intolerably troublesome, and, by degrees, perhaps eat out the heart and briskness of his devotion and religion: we should so order all our religious exercises, as to put as little constraint upon our-

selves as may be; and the way to do that is to leave ourselves at liberty as to the particular modes and methods, and times and circumstances of them: if we do but secure the performance of our duty, we do our work. The best way to secure it is, not by binding ourselves to this or the other method, but by making it as easy as we can to our present circumstances: we must relax, if we mean to keep up the edge and fervour of our minds towards spiritual things, and would not fall into that loathing and disgust of them, nor feel that tediousness in them that we are now complaining of; we must, I say, indulge a great deal to our humours and tempers, and not always be forcing ourselves upon this or the other exercise, which is against the grain of our present inclination: thus, for instance, if I find that my attention will not hold out to the length of my ordinary devotions, why, in this case, let me not scruple to shorten and contract them: if I cannot pray with devotion and affection in my usual form, let me take another that pleaseth me better at that time, or use no form at all, but pray as my affections lead me: if praise and thanksgiving do better fit my present humour than confessing my sins, let me choose that, and let the other all alone.

Thus also in all the other actions of religion, where no express law of God hath interposed; (for as for the rules of devotion that you meet with in books, they are no laws to you, though they may be good directions;) I say, where no express law of God hath interposed, there it is the wisest way to comply with our own inclinations, and not needlessly to cross and tease ourselves. By this means we shall make religion and devotion, by degrees, na-

tural and easy and pleasant to us, and in a great measure avoid that coldness of affection, those wanderings of thought, that tediousness and dulness and dryness of spirit, which the unnecessary restraint and obligations that men lay upon themselves in these matters are oftentimes the occasion of.

And this is all that I have to say upon this case.

Consider what ye have heard, and the Lord, &c.

A SERMON

ON

EXODUS XX. 8.

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.

HIS majesty, in his late letter to the bishops, requires that all the clergy be ordered to preach frequently against those particular sins which are most prevailing in this realm; as, namely, against blasphemy, swearing, and cursing; against perjury, against drunkenness, and against profanation of the Lord's day: and that they do also read to their people such statute law or laws as are provided against that vice or sin which is their subject on that day.

I intend, at this time, to treat of one of these arguments; namely, that which concerns the observation of the Lord's day; and for that reason the statute that concerns this matter was now read to you, and I shall go on with the rest of the things as I have opportunity.

The text I have chosen is the beginning of the fourth commandment, which all we of this church must needs own to be a law that obligeth us, because at the repetition of it by the minister, which is done every Sunday and holyday, we do all make this response; "Lord, have mercy upon us, and in-"cline our hearts to keep this law."

Now, if there be any thing obliging in that commandment, it is this, *Remember the sabbath day,*

to keep it holy; for that is the sum and substance of the commandment; all the other things there mentioned are but either an account of the reason why the seventh day is thus to be kept holy, or else an account of the manner how it was to be kept holy.

My argument then is the sabbath day; and in treating of it, I shall divide my Discourse into four parts.

The first shall be about our obligation to observe the sabbath in general.

The second shall be about the translation of the sabbath from the seventh day of the week to the first.

The third shall be about the great necessities and advantages of strictly observing the Lord's day, which is our sabbath.

The fourth shall be about the manner of observing it.

I begin with the first head, concerning our obligation to observe the sabbath in general; and this will be more than enough to entertain our meditations at this time. And here I am sensible I am entering into a field of controversy, where my business will not so much be to warm your affections, as to dispute and argue; but though my argument leads me to talk dryly, yet I shall endeavour to talk as plainly as I can.

For the preventing and avoiding disputes as much as can be, I desire to premise these three things:

First of all, when we talk of our obligation to observe the sabbath, we own that we use the word *sabbath* in a very improper sense: for the word *sabbath*, as it is always used, both in scripture and ecclesiastical writers, is constantly appropriated to the

Jewish sabbath, or Saturday; and therefore it is with some absurdity that a great many among us do call our Lord's day by the name of *the sabbath day.* If any foreigner heard us express ourselves so, they would verily believe we meant Saturday, and not Sunday: but, however, since it is customary among us to call our Lord's day by the name of *the sabbath day,* I do not refrain the use of it, especially at this time, when I am not treating of the particular day we are to observe, but of a day of rest in general, which may properly enough be called a sabbath, on what day soever it fall, for *sabbath* signifies no more than a day of rest.

There are two things to be distinguished in the sabbath, as it is used in scripture. First, that portion of time in general that is to be set apart for the more solemn worship of God; and that is, one day in the weekly revolution, or one day in seven.

Secondly, that precise particular day in the seven that was thus to be set apart. Now under the Jewish dispensation that was the last day of the week; but under the Christian dispensation it is the first day of the week: so that we may properly enough, when we speak in general of a day of rest in a weekly revolution, call it *a sabbath;* though the particular day, on which we Christians rest, is not so properly the sabbath as the Lord's day.

Secondly, whatever weight I lay upon the observation of the sabbath, yet I do not fetch it from any obligation that is upon us from any of Moses's laws in this matter. The laws that God gave upon mount Sinai by Moses did never concern any but the children of Israel, and those that dwelt among them: nor were they ever designed or intended to

be laws to any other nation, and therefore the Ten Commandments themselves, as they were delivered by Moses, though we confess they do oblige us, yet they do not oblige us at all by virtue of that promulgation, but upon other accounts; namely, either the reasonableness and goodness of the matter of them, or some new authority that is stamped upon them. Whatever therefore is wholly Jewish in the sabbath, though it be never so plainly required by God's law, doth no way concern us: and there are several laws relating to the sabbath in the Old Testament that are of that nature; nay, and some even in the fourth commandment, (which, as I said, our church owns in the general to be a law to us,) namely, not only the fixing the sabbath to the seventh day of the week, but also the strict rest both of man and beast on that day, which is there enjoined. But these things, as I shall shew hereafter, were no part of the law of the sabbath, as it is a law to us; and therefore we have no reason to concern ourselves about them.

The third and last thing I have to premise is this. When I talk of shewing the obligation that is upon all Christians to observe the sabbath, I would not have you expect other sort of proof for it than the thing affords. I will not be so positive as some have been, to affirm that the observance of the sabbath is bound upon us by the law of nature. No; nor dare I affirm that we have any direct, express law of our Lord Jesus to oblige us to it. But it is abundantly enough for our purpose, if we can shew that there are evidences enow of its being a law to all of us that believe in scripture; and that it is our duty to observe it; and that we sin if we do

not, unless there be urgent necessity in the case to excuse us.

Having premised these three things, I come to the point; and here I have two things to offer to you.

And first of all, if we take the lowest hypothesis that is laid down in this matter, I do not see but that it sufficiently infers our obligation to observe the sabbath. Those that give themselves the greatest latitude and liberty in talking on this argument, yet do own so much, as that it is impossible, even according to their principles, to excuse a man from sin (if he be a Christian) that lives in a constant neglect of the Lord's day. For thus we reason:

It is for ever a law to all mankind, and it is owned by all to be so, (because it is a branch of the law of nature,) that some portion of that time that God hath given us, some days of those many that he affords us, should be solemnly consecrated to his more immediate worship and service; and there ought to be a very frequent return of those days. For the honour of God is concerned in these two things, and without them it is impossible that even a face of religion should be kept up in the world.

Now if God has not by any immediate revelation set out those times or days, and the returns of them, it falls to the public authority, in every country that hath the care of religion, to do it: and what they establish in this case doth bind the consciences of all the subjects to its observance, even as if it was a divine law. Just as in the case of paying part of our estates by way of tribute, to the public use of our country. The law of nature as well as the law of Christ oblige us *to pay tribute to whom tribute*

is due; custom to whom custom. But now how much, or in what way we are to pay tribute or custom, that is not determined by the law of God, but by the laws of the country where we live: and they are to be the measure of every one's conscience in that matter; and he who in that case cheats the king of those customs which the law gives him as his due, doth offend against the law of God and nature, as well as against the law of the land.

So, I say, it stands with reference to our dues to God. He that defrauds God Almighty of that portion of time, which by the laws of his country is solemnly consecrated or devoted to him, may be truly said to sin against God in that matter, as well as to transgress a canon, or an act of parliament.

The case now standing thus, admit that there was no particular law of God about this matter that did any way concern us Christians, yet these two things we find:

We find, in the first place, that whereas all other nations were left to the discretion of their lawgivers, for the assigning those portions of time that should be given to God's public service; yet there was one nation among whom that matter was perfectly taken care of by God himself, (who certainly is the best judge of what proportion of our time is fit to be given to him,) and he determined to make it a perpetual law, that every seventh day that came over their heads should be solemnly dedicated to his service.

We find likewise, that though our Lord Jesus made no new law in this matter, yet his disciples, from the very beginning, thinking they could not follow a better precedent than what God had set before

them in his laws to his own people the Jews; they likewise pitched upon the same proportion, and religiously set apart one day in every seven to their more solemn assemblies for the worship of God. And accordingly that practice hath been ever since continued by all the Christians in the world; and wheresoever Christianity hath been the established religion of a country, the laws of that country, both ecclesiastical and civil, have appropriated that day to the solemn worship of God.

Why now, I say, admit there was no more to be said for the religious observation of one day in seven among us, but this that I have mentioned, yet even this is abundantly sufficient to lay an obligation upon every man's conscience to do it, and abundantly sufficient to convince him that he sins if he do not. Though the gospel gives no command about the sabbath, yet both the law of nature and the gospel give this general command, That stated times should be set apart for God's public worship: and if all Christendom have agreed that one day in seven shall be that stated time, every man, in my judgment, is bound in point of conscience to the observance of that day, unless some great necessity happens that hinders him; in which case, the most express law of God, in such matters, might be dispensed with.

Thus, I am sure, we are wont to argue in twenty other cases. It will be as hard to produce a plain precept out of the New Testament, for the baptism of infants, as it will be for the observing of the Lord's day: but yet, since there is this general precept, that all nations should be made proselytes to the gospel; and the way of making a proselyte was by baptism; and since it was the practice of the

Jews, that when any family was made proselytes to the law of Moses the children were baptized as well as the grown persons; and since, lastly, the whole Christian church for many ages hath used that practice, I do think we do deservedly account it more than a breach of a bare ecclesiastical law, to refuse the bringing our children to baptism. Thus, again, there is no law, either of nature or scripture, that marriage shall be solemnized by an ecclesiastical person. But yet, since there is this general resolution, both of nature and scripture, that all cohabitation of man and woman without marriage is fornication; and since the laws of the land and the church have made it necessary to a marriage, that a minister join the persons, I hope by all sober persons it will be accounted more than bare formality, even a necessary duty incumbent upon them by God's laws, to be joined together in matrimony, as the church appoints, before they live together as man and wife.

I might bring many more instances of this nature, but these are abundantly sufficient to shew that there is a vast difference, as to the obligation of conscience, between laws that are purely human, as to the matter of them, and laws that, as to the matter of them, are divine, though the determination of them, as to their particular circumstances, be left to human prudence. In the former case, men are not so strictly obliged; they do but offend against human authority at the most if they transgress them; but in the latter case, as they do directly transgress the laws of men, so do they interpretatively transgress the laws of God: and this is the case of the sabbath.

But, secondly, to come to the other thing I have to offer to you: we have hitherto proceeded from the lowest hypothesis that is laid down as to this matter; and I think we may advance a great deal higher. That which I have hitherto said only amounts to this; that by the law of God some portion of our time should be dedicated to his service, and that the return of those times should be frequent. But that one day in seven should be thus dedicated, that, as to us, is only of human appointment. From whence it seems to follow, that the same authority that appointed that, might, if they please, rescind or alter it; and instead of one day in seven, which is the notion of the sabbath, might order us to keep one day in six, or one day in eight. So that, after all, the law of the sabbath is but a precarious thing, and depends altogether upon the will of our governors. This is the great objection that is to be made against that account I have now given.

Now to obviate this, I say further, in the second place, that there is so much to be urged, not only in general, for God's requiring determinate, set times, frequently returning for his public service; but also for his fixing those times to one day in every seven, and that to continue as a standing law, in all the countries of the world where his will is known; I say, there is so much, from reason and authority, to be urged for this, that for my part I do not think it is in the power of any human authority upon earth, whether ecclesiastical or civil, to alter this constitution. Now if this can be made out, I think there is as sure and effectual a foundation laid for the perpetual obligation to observe the sabbath, as the

strictest of the sabbatarians can desire. This thing indeed is not to be made out by any single argument, but by a great many taken together. We are to prove this matter, as we prove the truth and divinity of the Christian religion, not by any one single medium or topic, but from several considerations amassed together and brought into one view.

And, first of all, let this be laid as a foundation: God, in the management and ordering of the very first work he did, (which was the creation of the world,) seemed to design that a seventh part of our time should be consecrated to an holy rest for his honour and service. God created the world in six days, and rested on the seventh. What can be the natural meaning of this, but to teach us that we should work six days, and on the seventh rest from our ordinary labours, and apply ourselves to reflection, both upon our own works, and more particularly on the works of God Almighty, in order to the praising and celebrating his holy name. Certainly there is something of a moral instruction to all mankind, intended by God, in thus ordering the works of the creation. It had been the same thing to him to have made and furnished the world in one day, nay, in one minute of a day, as in six days: if he had but spoke the word, at once all the creatures of heaven and earth had been in the same actual being and order that they were at the end of the six days. But this method he chose to do all his works in, that all the generations of the world, to whom the history of the creation should come, might from hence have a perpetual everlasting reason and foundation to dedicate one day to a holy rest after six days of labour. There is no possible

account to be given of this manner of proceeding but this.

But that is not all. In the second place, this is the very account that God himself gave to the first parents of mankind of this his proceeding. He did not leave them to collect this conclusion from their own reason; but because he finished his work in six days, and rested the seventh, therefore they should finish their works in six days, and rest a seventh: I say, he did not leave this matter with them, but he expressly declared, and gave it in instruction to our first parents, and to their children after them, that they should do as he had done. For the very first thing we hear, after the works of the creation were finished, is this, as you have it in Gen. ii. 2. *On the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his works which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it;* that is, separated it from common uses; for that is always the notion of sanctification. And why so? It follows, because that in it he had rested from all his works. Here is not only an express declaration that God from the beginning separated or consecrated one day in seven; but also the ground and reason for which he did so, namely, because on the seventh day he had rested from all his works.

What greater evidence now can we desire, for the sabbath being of perpetual obligation to all mankind, than these two things I have mentioned? Here is an everlasting ground and foundation laid for it in the very works of the creation; here is likewise an express declaration of God's will, that, upon that ground and foundation, a perpetual holy rest on one day in

every seven should be established. And accordingly, from the beginning of the world, that proportion or quota of our time is by God consecrated to himself; and, lastly, this consecration of the seventh day to the service of God could have no respect to the Jews, or any other particular nation, because it was grounded upon the works of the creation, and was made in the time of our first parents; and therefore must be supposed to be of universal concernment, and to extend to all the children of Adam, to whom the history of the creation should come. I do not see what can be reasonably said against this way of arguing. I am confident all that are acquainted with the holy scripture will be satisfied with it: sure I am, both our Saviour and St. Paul do reason after this manner. St. Paul, in the eleventh chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, makes it his business to prove the superiority of man above the woman; but pray mind what topic he proves it from; why this very topic we are now upon, the method of God's creating them: *the man*, saith he, *is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man; therefore ought she to be in subjection.* You see plainly here, that because God made man first, and out of him created woman, and declared withal that he therefore created her that she might be a helpmate for the man, St. Paul doth from hence conclude the perpetual obligation of woman to be subject to the man.

Thus, again, our Saviour argues just after this manner, in the business of putting away one wife and marrying another. The Pharisees had brought that case to him, whether such a practice was lawful:

he answers that it was not. They urged the permission of Moses, who had allowed them to put away their wives, if they gave them a writing of divorcement. He tells them that this was permitted to them only upon account of the *hardness of their hearts*, (that is, the cruelty of their natures,) *but from the beginning it was not so.* How now doth he prove this? Why he urgeth the manner of God's creation of mankind: *Have you not read*, saith he, *that he which made them in the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall be joined to his wife: and they two shall be one flesh? Wherefore*, saith he, *they are no more two, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.*

You see that our Saviour's argument here, that a man should have but one wife, and that those two should not be separated, is purely drawn from this, *that God created one man and one woman at the first, and joined them together, and made them one flesh.* See Matthew xix. 3. and so on.

If now this be a good argument (as there is no doubt but it is) that a man should for ever be obliged to have but one wife, I cannot imagine but that it is as good an argument, that every man should be obliged to rest on the seventh day, after six days labour; because this was the method that God took in the creation of the world, and not only so, but he did from that ground sanctify the seventh day to be a day of rest to all the posterity of Adam and Eve.

I know of no objection against what I have said, unless it be this; it is indeed hardly worth mentioning; but because some have urged it I will take no-

tice of it. They say the institution of the sabbath was not so early as we pretend; for the first command was given by God in Marah, after the children of Israel came out of Egypt. But to this I answer, that this is said without any reason, nay, contrary to all reason. For though the command of the sabbath was then first renewed, yet it was not then first given, for it was given at the beginning of the world; and for this we have the express word of the scripture, that God upon the finishing his works *blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it.* Ay, but say they, these words are prophetical, or spoken by way of anticipation; that is to say, Moses when he had given an account of the history of the creation in six days, took that occasion to shew the reason why God in following times appointed the sabbath to the Jews. Very well; they do indeed, in saying this, make Moses an admirable orator as well as an historian; for they make him speak such strange figures, and tell his story in such a way, as never any good author did since his time.

Moses pretends to give us a plain history of the creation, and of what happened thereupon. *On the seventh day,* saith he, *God ended his work; and he rested the seventh day from all his works that he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he rested from all his works.* Now, say these people, the meaning of these words is no more than this: *God rested the seventh day from all his works that he had made,* and twenty four hundred years after, in Marah, *he blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it,* to the people of Israel. But I appeal to any man, whether this be not a plain force upon the words, and

whether any man of sense that should meet with such a passage in any other historian could possibly so interpret it. But this is our comfort, that though some of the Jews talk after this manner, yet the discreetest, and those that are incomparably the best and most judicious writers of that nation, are of another opinion, and own the institution of the sabbath to have been from the very creation of the world.

And indeed if there had not been such express testimony of scripture for it, yet there are a great many other arguments that would have persuaded us thereunto. I will at this time mention but one thing.

What account can be given of all the world's computing their time by weeks; that is, counting seven days, and then beginning again; I say, what possible account can be given of this, but that original distribution of time that God had observed in the works of the creation, and had delivered to the first parents of mankind, and they to their children? For men to reckon time by days and nights is obvious to sense; nay, and to compute time by months and years hath a sufficient foundation in it from nature; for mankind cannot avoid observing the course of the moon and of the sun, which makes months and years: but why they should count seven days, and then begin again, that hath no foundation in nature, but must be taught them from the tradition of their fathers, which could have no other original than that which I am now insisting on.

And yet this way of computing time by a weekly revolution obtained throughout all the world, as far as we can judge, from the very beginning of time. That the patriarchs did so, some hundreds of years before the law of the sabbath was given to the chil-

dren of Israel, we have sufficient evidence from sundry texts of scripture: that all the ancient nations, of whom we have any history, both Egyptians, Chaldeans, Greeks, Romans, nay, and the barbarous nations too, I say, that they did so likewise, is proved to us from the ancientest records that are extant about them.

This practice now, that had no foundation in nature, obtaining thus universally throughout the whole world, and that from time immemorial, is to me a demonstration that they had it from the first parents of mankind, and that it was founded in God's institution of the seventh day being set apart to his service.

I do grant, indeed, they did not know the true reason why they thus counted their days by sevens: for the tradition of the creation of the world, and the institution of the sabbath, was in time, and by degrees, lost among them; but yet thus still they computed their time; and we that have the scriptures know upon what grounds that computation was begun. But thus much of this point.

Two things now, I think, we have established:

First, that God, in the creation of the world, did direct to the observation of one day in seven to his service.

Secondly, that he did expressly declare to our first parents, that it was his mind that this sabbath should be observed: and these, I think, are very good foundations to build our structure upon.

But there is a great deal more to be added; as, namely, in the third place, it is very observable, that when God came to give his body of laws to the Jews 2400 years after the creation, and by them to

repair the ruins that idolatry and the evil customs of the world had brought upon that people, he had so great a regard to this first law of the creation concerning the sabbath, that he took care to put it among the *ten words*, (as they are called in Deuteronomy,) I mean the Ten Commandments, which he himself distinguished from the rest of the laws he gave by Moses, by pronouncing them with his own voice from heaven.

Fourthly, when our Saviour came to give a new law, though he did abolish all the ceremonial laws of Moses, yet the law of the Ten Commandments he seems to have ratified and confirmed, and consequently that law which concerns the observation of a sabbath.

Fifthly, in pursuance of this, the apostles and the first Christians, though they threw out of the fourth commandment all that was perfectly Jewish and ceremonial, yet they retained the substance of it, and accordingly did constantly charge it upon themselves to set apart one day in seven for the public worship of God: and this practice, thus begun by the apostles, hath ever since continued in all ages, and in all churches of the Christian world.

Whether now all these things taken together do not evince that the law of the sabbath is more than a mere human, ecclesiastical constitution, and that it is not in the power of the whole church to abrogate or to alter it, (which was the thing to be proved,) I will leave you to be judges of.

But I cannot now fill up these three last heads; I must refer that, with the rest of my Discourses upon this argument, to some other opportunity.

Consider what ye have heard, &c.

A SERMON

ON

EXODUS XX. 8.

Remember to keep holy the sabbath day.

I HAVE entered upon this argument already, and made one Discourse upon it: I now design to go on with it.

The method I proposed was, to discourse upon these four heads:

First, Of our obligation to observe the sabbath in general, taking that word as signifying no more than setting apart one day in the weekly revolution for the worship of God.

Secondly, Of the change of the sabbath from the seventh day of the week to the first.

Thirdly, Of the importance of this duty, and great advantage of strictly observing the Lord's day.

Fourthly, Of the manner of observing it.

I began with the first of these heads; namely, concerning our obligation to observe the sabbath in general: and the first thing I urged was this, That if we take the lowest hypothesis that is laid down in this matter, and proceed only upon such grounds as are allowed by those that talk the most loosely in this matter, yet by this way of reasoning we may sufficiently infer an everlasting obligation upon our consciences to observe the sabbath: for admitting that there is no particular law of God that concerns us, which requires our observation of a sabbath, yet

it is granted on all hands, that there is a general law of God, which requires that some portions of that time he hath given us, some days of those many that he affords us, should be solemnly consecrated to his more immediate worship and service; and there ought to be a very frequent return of those days. Now if God hath not, by any immediate revelation, set out those times or days, and the return of them, it falls to the public authority, in every country that hath the management of the affairs of religion, to take care of it, and what they establish in this case suitable to the principles of reason, and the other notices we have of God's will, doth bind the consciences of all the subjects to its observance, even as if it was a divine law. Though there be no particular law of God that obligeth us Christians to observe one day in seven, more than one day in six or eight, yet both the law of nature and the law of the gospel give this general command, that stated times should be set apart for God's public worship: though therefore there be no particular law of God in this matter, yet since the Christians, from the very beginning, took up this practice in imitation of the Jews, setting apart one day in seven for the worship of God, and that practice, wherever Christianity hath obtained, has been strictly bound upon us by the laws both ecclesiastical and civil, this is enough, in all reason, to lay an obligation upon every man's conscience to observe this day.

But, secondly, there are others do carry this matter a great deal higher, and do affirm, that God hath not left us to the general dictates of nature, and the example of the Jews, and the constitution of the church or state grounded thereupon, as to the

proportion of the time that we are to dedicate to his service; but he himself hath sufficiently declared his will in that matter, and has made it a standing, perpetual law to all mankind to whom the knowledge of his revelations should come, that one day in every seven should be thus dedicated to him; nor is it in the power of any church or state to alter or vary from this proportion. Now, for the proof of this, they reason after this manner:

In the first place, God, in the very creation of the world, did direct to the observance of one day in seven to his service; for what reason can be given of his making the world in six days, and resting on the seventh, but this, that he might hereby lay an everlasting ground and foundation for our observing one day in seven as an holy rest?

Secondly, he did expressly declare that this was his meaning, and gave it in charge to our first parents, that they should rest on the seventh day as he had done. The holy scripture tells us, that after the heavens and the earth were finished, *God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it*, because that in it he rested from all his works. Now what was thus blessed and set apart by the order of God to our first parents must certainly concern all the children that came of them: thus far I went the last time.

I now proceed. Thirdly, when God came to give his laws to his peculiar people the Jews, 2400 years after the creation, and by them to repair the ruins that idolatry and the evil customs of the world had brought upon that people; so great a regard had he to this first law of the creation concerning the sabbath, that he took care to put it among the Ten Commandments; which he sufficiently shewed he had a

greater value for than all the rest of the laws he gave by Moses, in that he pronounced them with his own voice from heaven; in that he twice writ them upon two tables of stone with his own finger; in that he ordered them to be laid up in the ark of the covenant for an everlasting memorial. Now it is certain that nine of those Ten Commandments are of a moral nature, and are of everlasting obligation to all mankind all the world over: and is it not then very probable that the remaining one (I mean the fourth, which concerns the sabbath) is of the same nature, and was intended to be of the same obligation to all those to whom the notices of these things should come? To suppose otherwise, is indeed to charge God with such a botch, such an ill-contrived method of shuffling his laws together, as no prudent lawgiver would be guilty of.

Add, in the fourth place, that when our Saviour came to give a new law that should oblige all Christians to the end of the world, though he did not give any particular law about the sabbath, yet he seems to have confirmed the Ten Commandments, (of which the law of the sabbath was one,) and to have adopted them into his laws: for it is of these that he seems to speak, when he saith, in the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, *I came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it,* or to fill it up. It is of these that he speaks, when, to the man that asked him *what he should do to inherit eternal life,* he gave this answer, *If thou wouldest enter into life, keep the commandments.* And, lastly, it is of these Ten Commandments that St. James speaks, when he saith, *He that breaks one of these is guilty of all;* that is to say, because they are all bound upon us by the same authority.

These things seem to import, that it was never the design of Christ to let the authority of the Ten Commandments cease among mankind: and though they were no law to us by virtue of their promulgation on mount Sinai, yet by his exacting obedience to them, they became laws to us: it is true, they all of them, except this one, would have been so, though he had never mentioned them, because nine of them are the dictates of nature, and grounded upon eternal reason: but his mentioning the commandments so often, and laying stress upon them, and never once excepting or excluding the fourth out of the number, is an argument that he meant that all of these, as they stand in the Decalogue, should have authority with us: and certainly this is the sense of the church of England worship, because in her public offices these Ten Commandments are given us as the measure of our duty both to God and man; and in the rehearsal of them, in the Sunday service, we do as much ask pardon of God for the breach of the fourth commandment, and implore his grace that we may keep it for the future, as we do with respect to any of the rest: and yet, if there be any thing at all required in the fourth commandment, it is the setting apart one day in seven to God's service.

But, fifthly, to go on with our argument. As God in the creation of the world directed to the observation of one day in seven, and gave it as a law to our first parents, and renewed it afterwards in the Ten Commandments, and these Ten Commandments were adopted by Christ into this law, and consequently the fourth commandment as well as the rest; so in the last place, in pursuance of all this, it is observable that the apostles and first Christians, though

they threw out of the fourth commandment all that was perfectly Jewish and ceremonial, yet they retained the substance of it, and accordingly did constantly charge it upon themselves to set apart one day in seven for the public worship of God: and this practice, thus begun by the first Christians, hath ever since continued in all ages and in all churches of the Christian world. This is matter of fact, and it is so evident, that none that I know do deny it; and therefore it is needless to offer to prove it.

It is true indeed that some churches, for a considerable time after Christ, did observe both the Jewish and the Christian sabbath: but sure this cannot be brought as an argument against what we are saying. It is plain, by their practice, they all made a conscience of keeping one day in seven holy to God; but if, in imitation of the Jews, they would keep Saturday as well as Sunday, this rather strengthens our assertion, that they thought the law of the fourth commandment to be obliging to them, than any way to weaken it: it shews indeed, supposing they took up this practice as a matter of duty, that they were in doubt which was the right day they were obliged to keep, and therefore for sureness they would keep both; but, in the mean time, it is a demonstration that they thought themselves obliged to keep one day in seven.

Thus I have represented to you, in as few words as I can, the arguments that are brought for the proving that the sabbath, or the observation of one day in seven for religious uses, is more than a bare human institution, and that it is bound upon us by God Almighty himself. I must confess I think there

is great weight in them; but I will not censure any man that cannot come up to these measures, provided that he takes himself to be obliged in conscience to observe the Lord's day, though he fetches that obligation from other grounds and principles: but whoever doth not that, whoever hath so little sense of religion as not to think himself bound to dedicate one day in the week to join with his fellow Christians in the solemn worship of God, such a man I can hardly believe to be a Christian, though he never so much calls himself by that name.

And thus much of our first head, namely, concerning our obligation to observe the sabbath in general; that is, to set apart one day in seven for the more solemn worship of God.

I now come to the second head, concerning the change of the sabbath from the seventh day of the week, as it was observed by the Jews, to the first day of the week, as it is observed by the Christians. And here the obvious question is, By what authority was this done? what law of the gospel have we to shew for this change? and, if we can produce none, how comes it to pass that we Christians do not observe the seventh day of the week, as it is ordered in the fourth commandment? God saith, *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.* Now all the world knows that the sabbath day that is there spoken of was the last day in the weekly revolution, that day which the Jews observe for their sabbath, and not the first day of the week, or Sunday, as we Christians now observe: either therefore you must shew some law of Christ, whereby he hath appointed Sunday to be the day that is to be solemnly devoted to him, or

else, if we be obliged to observe any sabbath at all, we are obliged to observe it according to the law of the fourth commandment.

I have put the difficulty as strongly as I can, and I doubt not but I shall sufficiently clear it, if you will have the patience to attend to what I have to say to it.

The first thing I say is this, that all this argumentation proceeds upon a false ground; it supposeth that we were all under an obligation to observe the same day of the week that the Jews were, unless Christ should give a contrary command: but this is a great mistake; we are no more bound to observe the sabbath, as it was a Jewish institution, than we are bound to observe their new moons and solemn festivals; and this St. Paul himself hath told us in Coloss. ii. 16. *Let no man*, saith he, *judge you in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ:* that is to say, Let no man censure or condemn you, Christians, for not religiously observing those solemn days which the law of Moses commanded the Jews to keep holy, such as the new moons and the sabbaths; for these were the types and shadows of what was to come, and so are vanished by the appearing of the substance which is Christ Jesus. These words do as plainly shew as words can do, that, if St. Paul be to be believed, we Christians are not bound to kéep the sabbath day as the Jews by their law were obliged to keep it.

The truth of it is, no law of Moses did oblige any but the Jews, to whom they were given, and those that lived among them: so far indeed as the matter

and reason of those laws were of universal concernment, so far all mankind that came to the knowledge of them were bound to take notice of them: and there was something in the law of the sabbath that seemed to be of this nature, namely, that we should keep one day in seven in memory of the creation; but for the particular day that the Jews kept, that was appointed them by God for a reason that did peculiarly concern themselves, and therefore none but themselves, and those that lived among them, were obliged by it. This now being so, it is an impertinent question to ask, what law of Christ hath abrogated Saturday, and put Sunday in the place of it; for what needed there any authority of Christ to abrogate a law that we were never bound to observe?

But here it will be said, Doth not our church own the fourth commandment to lay an obligation upon us? and doth not that fourth commandment expressly require the observation of the last day of the week, and not of the first?

To this I will give two plain answers: first, though our church owns the authority of the fourth commandment as well as of the rest, yet it doth not own an obligation to practise all that is required in the fourth commandment; for neither our church, nor any other Christian church, from our Saviour's time to this, did ever teach that Christians were bound to observe that strict bodily rest, both of man and beast, which the fourth commandment seems to require, and which the Jews practised. So far from that, that several Christian councils have censured them for Judaizers that thought themselves bound to follow the letter of the Jewish law in this matter; and they likewise passed the same censure upon those that

believed they were obliged to keep the same day: so that you see we may own the obligation of the fourth commandment without thinking ourselves concerned either to observe the same day, or the same rest on that day, which that commandment requires.

But then, secondly, if it is strictly examined, it will be found that the fourth commandment doth not lay any greater stress upon one day of the week than on another, but may as well and as properly be applied to the day that we Christians observe, as to that day which the Jews observed: for all that is there required seems to be this; that one day in seven, that is, a seventh day after six days of labour, should be dedicated to an holy rest, in memory of the creation. Run over all the particulars of the commandment, and you will not be able to find one expression that imports more: and therefore it was enough to answer all the ends of that commandment, if any one day in seven be set apart for that purpose.

Well, but it will be replied, Was not Saturday the day of the Jewish sabbath? and doth not the commandment expressly refer to that day? I answer, I do readily grant it; but then, I say, that Saturday was not appointed for their sabbath by virtue of this commandment, but by a former law which was given to the Jews in the wilderness of Sin, as you may see in the sixteenth chapter of Exodus. In that chapter you will find, that that which fixed the day on which the Jews were to observe their sabbath, was the ceasing of the manna to drop on that day, as it had done for the six before; that was the sign, as Moses told them, by which they should know the day on which God would have them to rest. Before this they knew nothing of the day; they only knew that

God would have them to rest one day in seven, and it is very certain, that on the seven-night before (which would have been their sabbath, if they had known of the day) they were so far from resting, that they went a very long journey, as appears from that chapter: but then it was that God fixed the day for their sabbath, (and I shall by and by shew for what reason he pitched upon that day;) afterwards, when they came to mount Sinai, he gave, in the fourth commandment, a general law for the observance of it.

I cannot deny, indeed, that God's commandment had reference to that particular day, which had been so lately appointed them: yet the commandment is put in such words, and such a reason is thereby given for it, as would serve for any other day in the weekly revolution as well as that.

To put this yet in a better light, if it be possible, we own that all the Ten Commandments, though as to the substance of them they were all of them of perpetual obligation to mankind, yet, as they were given on mount Sinai, there are several things added to them, on purpose for the accommodating them to the present state of the Israelites, to whom they were given. Thus God puts a preface to them, which wholly related to the Jews; *I am the Lord thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage:* thus the threatening, in the second commandment, of *visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation;* and the promise in the fifth, *of living long in the land which the Lord their God had given them.* These are plainly added to the commandments, with respect to that dispensation that the Jews were then under; and so we say, as to the

fourth, the bodily rest that is there enjoined, and the precise day to which the commandment hath respect, are by no means of the essence or substance of the commandment, but are to be accounted as circumstantials added to it, the better to accommodate it to the state of the Jewish church that then was.

The sum of all that I have said is this; that the owning an obligation upon us, to keep one day in seven as a holy rest to God, doth not infer an obligation upon us to keep that precise day God gave to the Jews, neither doth the fourth commandment require it; and therefore there needs not any new law of Christ for the abolishing of that day and appointing another. All therefore that is here to be inquired into is, what reason the apostles, who made the change, had for so doing? For if they had good reason rather to pitch on the first day of the week than on the last for the sabbath, there is no doubt in the world but they were at liberty to do it; and what they did in this matter would oblige all of us that come after them so far as the reason they proceeded upon doth continue. Now to give an account of this is the second thing I have to do in order to the answering of this difficulty: and this is that which I say, that that very reason upon which God proceeded in appointing Saturday for the Jewish sabbath rather than any other day; I say, that very reason and ground did the apostles (and no doubt, either by the command of Christ or the guidance of the Holy Spirit) proceed upon in the pitching upon Sunday for the Christian sabbath (if we may so call it) rather than Saturday. To explain myself as to this: you are to know that the great end and design of God's appointing one day in seven to be kept holy

was, that all mankind should remember the creation of the world, and own that God which created heaven and earth to be their God. This observation of one day in seven was to be as a sign, or mark, or badge, that they acknowledged and worshipped that one God which made heaven and earth.

This is the account that the scripture all along gives of this matter. Thus, in Ezekiel xx. 20. saith God, *Ye shall hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God;* and thus in Exod. xxxi. 16. *the children of Israel shall observe the sabbath throughout all their generations for a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever.* A sign of what? Why, a sign that the Creator of heaven and earth is their God; for thus it follows; *for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested;* and this indeed is the true account and meaning of the fourth commandment.

Now this account of the sabbath, you see, doth equally concern both Jews and Gentiles. If the sabbath was therefore appointed, that by the observation of it men might testify to the world that they owned the one supreme God that made the world to be their God, then certainly all men that profess the true religion are equally concerned in the observation of it: well, but then how come the Jews to observe one day, and the Christians another? Why, this is the thing I now come to give an account of.

You are to know that God, in delivering the children of Israel out of Egypt, took upon himself a new relation to that people; he was their Creator from the beginning, but from henceforward, after he

had delivered them out of the house of bondage, he became their redeemer, their deliverer; and under that notion he would have himself to be acknowledged in all the acts of worship that that people were to perform to him: there are an hundred instances of this in the laws of Moses; but it very remarkably appears in this business we are now talking of; for when God comes to renew the commandment of the sabbath, (which was at the first instituted for the owning of the creation of the world,) he adds a new consideration to it, and orders the Jews, in the observation thereof, not only to recognise him as the Creator of heaven and earth, (which all mankind were bound to do as well as they,) but also to acknowledge him as their deliverer out of Egypt; and for that purpose he pitched upon that day, in the weekly revolution, to be their sabbath, on which he had wrought their deliverance out of Egypt, by drowning Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea; so that the Jews had a twofold reason for observing the sabbath. As they were a part of mankind, they kept the sabbath to acknowledge thereby that they owned the supreme God, the Creator of heaven and earth; and this they did by observing one day in seven, according to God's original institution: as they were embodied into one national society, called the people of Israel, they kept the sabbath to acknowledge thereby that God had delivered their nation from the bondage of Egypt; and this they did by observing that particular day in the seven which God had appointed in the wilderness of Sin, in remembrance of their coming out of Egypt.

If any one ask what proof I have for this, or how

it doth appear that God therefore pitched on that particular day to be the Jewish sabbath, because on that day he wrought his deliverance for them out of Egypt; I answer, I have an express text of scripture to vouch for it, which cannot well be interpreted in any other sense than what I have now said. The place I refer to is the fifth of Deuteronomy. There the Ten Commandments are repeated; but this is observable in the repetition of them when the fourth commandment comes to be repeated, that no mention is made of the original, universal reason of God's appointing the sabbath; namely, the creation of the world in six days, as it is given in the fourth commandment delivered in the twentieth of Exodus; but another reason for the observation of the sabbath is put in the place thereof: I will read the words to you as they are in the fifteenth verse of that chapter; and they are worth your observing; *Remember,* saith God, *that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence with a mighty hand and stretched out arm: therefore the Lord thy God commandeth thee to keep the sabbath day.*

These are the words of God in Deuteronomy; but what is the meaning of them? Did God therefore command the observation of the sabbath (that is, one day in seven) because he brought the children of Israel out of Egypt? that cannot be; for the reason is quite otherwise given, both in the beginning of Genesis, and in the delivery of the Ten Commandments, in the twentieth of Exodus; by both those places it appears that God therefore commanded the observation of one day in seven, because that he made the world in six days and rested on the

seventh: this therefore must be the meaning of this text. God therefore commanded the observation of that particular day in the seven as a day of rest to the Jews, because that on that day he delivered his people from the bondage of Egypt *with a mighty hand and stretched out arm.*

These things now well considered, we have a sufficient reason given us both why we should not keep the same day of the week for our sabbath that the Jews did, and likewise why we should keep the first day of the week rather than any other in the weekly revolution.

St. Paul tells us the observation *of the new moons and sabbaths* were *shadows of things to come, but the body is Christ.* Now since it appears that the day of the sabbath, as it was appointed to the Jews, was in memory of their deliverance out of Egypt; and since that deliverance out of Egypt was but a type of our redemption by Christ Jesus from the spiritual bondage of the spiritual Pharaoh, that is to say, the Devil; then certainly, after this deliverance, this redemption is actually wrought, the type is out of doors; and if that be no more to be remembered, then is not the day which was set apart for the commemoration of it to be any further remembered neither.

But that is not all: the Jewish day of the sabbath is not only vanished, nay indeed it would be horrible superstition to observe it, but another day is actually set up in the place of it by the apostles, and that, without doubt, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit; and such a day, that no man can in the least be surprised that it was pitched upon rather than any other day in the weekly revolution; for since

both Jews and Christians do agree that one day in seven is to be set apart for the acknowledgment and worship of the one true God, the maker of heaven and earth; and since it is evident that in the Jewish dispensation that day was so ordered, as that together with the acknowledgment of the supreme God it should put them in mind of that God's being their redeemer and deliverer out of Egypt; what can more naturally fall into the thoughts of any Christian than this, that as, with the Jews, we are to set apart one day in every seven to the solemn worship of God, the maker of heaven and earth; so, as we are Christians, we are to pitch upon such a day for that as shall at the same time put us in mind of the great redemption and deliverance that was wrought for us by our Lord Jesus Christ? And what day in the weekly revolution can that be, but the day on which God vanquished the Devil, and redeemed us out of our spiritual bondage by raising up our Lord Jesus from the dead, and thereby begetting us to a lively hope of everlasting life?

There is nothing more remains to be done upon this argument, but to shew that the apostles of our Lord did really, for this reason, pitch upon the first day of the week for the solemn day of their worship: but that being only matter of fact, and the proof of it to be made by testimony, I believe you will rather choose to take a man's word for it, than to be held any longer to hear quotations.

A SERMON

ON

EXODUS XX. 8.

Remember to keep holy the sabbath day.

I HAVE made two Discourses upon this argument already; and my business hitherto has been to shew that we Christians are obliged to keep one day in seven as a sabbath or holy rest unto God; and the day we are to keep to this purpose is the first day of the week, or Sunday.

As for the keeping one day in seven I shewed,

First, That God making the world in six days, and resting on the seventh, meant by this action to lay a foundation for an obligation on all mankind, to whom the knowledge of it should come, to set apart one day in every seven to the honour and acknowledgment of that God that created the world.

Secondly, That God sufficiently declared that this was his meaning by giving an express law to the first parents of mankind, and in them to all their posterity, that they should separate the seventh day, and keep it holy in memory of the creation.

Thirdly, That though this commandment, through the prevailing of idolatry in the world, was in time forgot, yet when God came to restore the true religion to his own people the Jews, and to give laws about it, he took care to retrieve the memory of this commandment among the rest of the laws of the creation; accordingly he put it into his two

tables wrote with his own hands, by which he sufficiently distinguished it from the temporary laws given to the Jews, and shewed that it was of obligation to all mankind for ever, since all the rest of the Ten Commandments were certainly and indispensably so.

Fourthly, When Jesus Christ came to give his laws to all mankind, and to set aside all that was perfectly Jewish in the worship of God, yet he all along seems to be so far from abrogating any of the Ten Commandments, that he lays great stress upon them, and yet the law of observing one day in seven is one of these ten.

Fifthly, All his disciples, from that time to this, made a conscience of keeping this commandment as well as the rest: nor was there ever any Christian church known that did not observe one day in seven as holy to God.

In the second place, as for the change of the day from the sabbath to the Lord's day, and that it is this latter day, the first day of the week, that we Christians are to observe, and not the Saturday, as the Jews observed; I say, for the satisfying you about this, I went upon these grounds:

First of all, that the observation of that particular day, namely, Saturday, more than any other of the seven, was perfectly Jewish, nor did the law that required it ever concern any other nation but that people, and those that dwelt among them, so that there was no need of having that day abolished.

Secondly, that the observation of that day is not required in the fourth commandment more than any other day in the seven; but that it is sufficient, for the fulfilling of that commandment, that any one

day of the seven be observed in the memory of the creation.

Thirdly, that the reason why God pitched on that day rather than any other of the seven, was not any reason that did concern all mankind, but only the Jewish nation; namely, because on that day he delivered them from the bondage of Egypt, by drowning Pharaoh and his host in the Red sea.

Fourthly, that for the very same reason that Saturday, among all the days of the seven, was pitched upon for the sabbath to the Jews, Sunday, among all the days of the seven, was pitched upon for the sabbath of the Christians: I say, both these days were pitched upon for the same reason; that is to say, as in the old law, that of Moses, God would have the Jews observe a sabbath in memory of the creation, but yet would have it observed on such a day, that, together with the creation, they might remember their redemption out of Egypt; so in the new law, that of Jesus Christ, God would have the Christians observe a sabbath in memory of the creation, but yet he would have it observed on such a day, that together with the creation we might remember our redemption by our Lord Jesus Christ: which redemption was then wrought and effected when he rose from the dead: on that day was Satan and his host confounded; and on that day was salvation wrought for all mankind from a greater slavery than ever Egypt was: and this is the reason why we Christians observe Sunday for our day of rest, and not Saturday: and indeed, if we should do otherwise, we should shew ourselves Jews, and not Christians: we should not seem to own our Saviour's redemption; in a word, we might as well

quit our baptism, and go back again to circumcision.

Thus far I have already gone: there remains one thing yet to be done upon this head, and then I leave it; and I shall despatch it very briefly: and that is, in

The fifth place, to shew what evidence we have that the Christians, from our Saviour's time, did proceed upon this ground that I have named, and did keep the first day of the week for their sabbath. Now, as to this, I only mention these few things:

That the first Lord's day that was kept was solemnized on that very day on which our Saviour rose from the dead. Then, as St. John tells us in the twentieth chapter, *then all the disciples assembled together*, and he takes notice of this circumstance, that it was the first day of the week; and at this meeting did Jesus first shew himself to them all, that he was risen from the dead. But Thomas, it seems, was not that day with them, and therefore doubted of the truth of what the rest had told him concerning our Saviour's shewing himself alive among them. What now came upon this? Did our Saviour presently appear to him for his conviction? No, not at all; but he let him remain under his doubt till the next Lord's day, till the day that the disciples met together again in a solemn manner; and this the same St. John takes notice of in verse 26. of the same chapter: *After eight days*, says he, *the disciples were within, and then Thomas was with them: and then came Jesus, and stood in the midst*, and spoke particularly to Thomas. So that here we see the second and first Lord's day the disciples met together, and both those days were graced

and sanctified by the apparition of our Saviour among them. That they met thus every first day of the week during our Saviour's conversing upon earth after his resurrection there is no doubt to be made, though the Gospels do not mention it; but that on the eighth Lord's day from the resurrection they were solemnly assembled together the scripture takes notice of with a witness. For on that day, *when they were all together with one accord, and in one place*, then did the Holy Ghost descend upon them in a visible manner, and endowed them with the gift of tongues; and by the virtue thereof St. Peter preached so powerfully, that on that day were added to the church three thousand converts. We have not henceforward particular mention made in the New Testament of their assembling on the first day of the week; but that they did always hold their religious assemblies on that day is abundantly plain from these two testimonies: the first is out of the first of the Corinthians, chap. xvi; there, in the second verse, St. Paul adviseth that every one should bring in his offering, or his alms, on the first day of the week, to be laid by for the use of the poor; which plainly implies, that on the first day of the week they used to hold their religious meetings.

The other testimony is still more convincing, and it is in the twentieth of the Acts, ver. 6; there St. Luke tells us, We *came*, saith he, *to Troas in five days; and there we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them until midnight.* It is not said here that St. Paul called the Christians together on that day, but the

words imply, that it was the custom of the Christians to meet on the first day of the week, in order to the religious worship of Christ, by hearing the word preached, and partaking in the holy sacrament, and therefore that opportunity St. Paul took of preaching so long to them.

These two texts are undeniable evidences of the practice of the church in those times as to this matter: but there is one thing more to be taken notice of out of the scripture, that is beyond all that I have yet said; and that is this: St. John, in his book of the Revelations, doth in express words call the first day of the week by the name of *the Lord's day*, and he brings it in so that any one may conclude that he did not impose that name upon it, but that it was the usual name by which it passed among all the Christians in those days; and accordingly by that name it is called even to this day: what now can we conclude from hence? Certainly one of these two things; either that that day was appointed by our Lord himself for the Christian sabbath, just as we call the sacrament of the communion *the Lord's supper*, because it is appointed by our Saviour; and this some of the first Christian fathers expressly assert; or else at least that all Christians had agreed together to consecrate and set apart that day to the honour of our Lord, and in memory of his resurrection, as the Jews set apart the seventh day in memory of their deliverance out of Egypt. Now which way soever we take it, it proves sufficiently to us, that the first day of the week was from the beginning the day that all Christians were to observe for their sabbath; or, to speak in a more proper language, the day that they

were more solemnly to dedicate to the worship of God and Christ Jesus.

All this proof now we have for the Lord's day out of the holy scripture of the New Testament; and as for the following times, the proofs are infinite. It is certain matter of fact, that all Christian churches, from the apostles' time to this, have enjoined and practised the religious observation of the Lord's day as a Christian duty. Nor of all the heresies or schisms that ever we read of to have broke out in the church, (and abundance of such there have been,) do we ever find any one that called this point into question. Howsoever men have differed in other points of Christianity, yet never was there any sect of men, no, nor any single man, that we know of, that ever denied or doubted of our obligation to observe the Lord's day. And this is a mighty thing, if it be well considered, to our present purpose.

Having thus given you as plain an account as I can of our obligation in general to dedicate one day in seven to the solemn service of God, and the reason for which we Christians dedicate the first day of the week, rather than any other day of the seven to that purpose; I now come to shew, in the third place, of what infinite concernment it is to religion, and the souls of men, that this day be strictly and religiously observed.

And here I do solemnly address myself to all of you, that you would seriously take this matter into your consideration, and not (as we are wont to do) look upon this business of the observation of the Lord's day as so inconsiderable a duty, that a little thing may excuse our neglect of it; for assuredly

very great matters depend upon it, even no less than the very being of Christianity, as well as the salvation of our own souls.

You may perhaps hear some dissolute atheistical men ask, What is one day better than another? Hath nature made any difference between days? Nay, hath not your religion forbid the making any difference? But you know this sort of men droll, they do not argue; they know very well that we do no more believe one day to be better or more holy in itself than another, than they; but yet, if they would consider, they would be as sensible as we that some days ought to be employed differently from other days, because the ends of piety and religion do necessarily call for it. But that is the thing they hate, and for that reason they hate all days that are devoted to it.

You will hear others talk more gravely; but yet if not with as ill a design, yet to as mischievous an effect as the former: they will tell you that every day ought to be dedicated to God Almighty's service; and therefore Sundays and holydays do not so much minister to religion, as to formality and superstition.

But I pray be pleased to consider, that though we ought to dedicate every day to God Almighty's service, yet this doth not hinder but that some days should be dedicated in another manner, and to other parts of his service, than it is possible for us to dedicate every day. We grant that whoever lives with a constant sense of God upon his mind, and makes a conscience of performing his daily devotions, and following his calling and employment diligently and honestly, and takes care to spend the remainder of his time, that is not thus employed, as well as he can,

at least innocently; I say, we make no scruple of allowing that every such man may be said to dedicate every day he thus spends to God Almighty's service. But yet, for all this, it is absolutely necessary for us to set apart some days in another manner, and to another kind of service of God than this amounts to. And since both the laws of God and man have fixed upon the first day of every week for that purpose, he seems neither to fear God nor reverence man, that doth not strictly and religiously devote that day to the more solemn service of God.

But I pray, if you please, let us look a little further into this matter, and examine the merits of it, and see what is to be said in point of reason for this observance of the Lord's day, which we so earnestly press, that it may not be said that we altogether rely upon arbitrary authority, whether of God or man, without any other intrinsic reason for this custom.

And in the first place, I pray think with yourselves whether it is not really a great mercy and kindness to all of us that one day in a week is by a public law consecrated to a holy rest? Do you think it is either for the good of man or beast that they should be constantly drudging and toiling without any respite, but just what the night gives them, wherein they cannot work? If such a weekly rest was not appointed, would it not be the wish and desire of all men that it should? Or imagine that the laws of God or man should oblige us to drudge all the days of our lives in our employments without any intermission, should not we look upon that as a very hard and severe imposition? Certainly any one would think, not only servants, but masters too, that follow their callings as they should do, should all be

of this opinion. That time therefore which God out of his bounty hath ordered for our rest and relaxation from our labours, and men, in obedience to him, have ratified by their laws, we are the sullennest perversest creatures in the world, if we do not joyfully and thankfully make use of it to those benefits and advantages. But it will be said, might not every man have been left to his own discretion in this matter, and set apart such times of rest for himself and his family, in order to the worship of God, as he judged most convenient for his own affairs? Why should we all be tied to one day?

I answer, if men were left to their own discretion in this matter, God help poor servants, who, generally speaking, were but like to have had a hard time of it; nay, and God help the masters themselves, for it is much to be feared they would not have been a quarter so kind to their own souls, as God and the laws have been to them. But if it be seriously asked, why we should all be tied to one day? I answer, the reason is obvious, because otherwise the end of setting apart any day could not have been attained. The very reason of our consecrating some of our time to God is, that thereby we might have opportunities of joining together in his public worship, and being instructed in the duties of our common Christianity; but what opportunities could we have for this, unless some common day be agreed upon for our assembling for these purposes?

But besides, I may urge another reason, which will perhaps more open some people's eyes, to see the reasonableness of such a common day, than any spiritual consideration; and that is this: that the setting apart one such day to the observance of which all shall be

obliged, is least prejudicial to our worldly affairs. For by this means, care is taken that no man shall make advantage of the works of his calling on that day, to the prejudice of any of his neighbours, because all men are by this law put under the same obligations of resting from their labours. But now if every man had been at liberty to appoint his own time of resting for himself and his family, a great inconvenience would have ensued upon that account. The sum of this consideration is this; that the reasonableness and equity of the law of the sabbath, even upon a political account, is so evident and so obvious, that men of sense cannot but thank God for this institution, as one of the most wise and prudent things that could have been contrived for the ease and benefit of mankind.

But, secondly, let us advance a step higher, let us leave the political consideration of the day, and come to the religion of it. And this I have to say to you:

You pretend to be Christians, and you hope for salvation in another life; and you hope for that salvation likewise no otherwise, but in the way that Jesus Christ hath appointed for the obtaining of it. Now is not this a main part of Jesus Christ's religion, that you should publicly, in the face of the world, own his faith, and join with the rest of his members in offering up to God the solemn sacrifices of prayer and praise, and hearing his gospel preached, and partaking in his holy sacraments? If this then be a part of the religion that our Lord and Master hath taught us, (as it certainly is, and a principal part too,) how dare any of us think ourselves at liberty, whether we will practise these things or no, on such days, as both

God, and the church, and the laws, have most solemnly devoted, and set apart for the performance of them? It is a strange Christianity that will encourage a man to hope he shall live with Christ hereafter, without shewing himself a member of Christ here. And how a man should shew himself a member of Christ, that doth not shew himself a member of his church, which is Christ's body, is a hard matter to conceive. And how a man should shew himself a member of Christ's church, that doth not make a conscience of worshipping God with the church, and partaking of the public ordinances of Christianity at those solemn times that God hath appointed, is every whit as hard.

But some men have got other notions of Christianity; it is enough, in their opinion, to approve themselves good Christians, that they live soberly and righteously, and now and then, when they have occasion, make their addresses in private unto God. Why this is very well, and I heartily wish that those men that give this account of their religion, did really practise even what they own to be their duty. But yet if they did, they come very far short of the true notion of Christ's religion: for they do not consider that all the great promises of Christ, of the pardon of sins, and the grace of the Holy Spirit, (without which it is impossible to live a Christian life,) are tied to the using the means of reconciliation which Christ hath appointed; which means are doubtless public ones; that is to say, these promises are chiefly made to those that, with contrition and devotion, join with their fellow Christians, in the solemn administrations of the church, confessing their sins, and imploring God's pardon, and partaking in his holy

word and sacraments; which are both the signs and the seals of his acceptance of us.

Whatever therefore people may pretend that they serve God in private, (though it is much to be feared they do not serve God at all, that do not make a conscience of joining in the public worship on the Lord's day,) yet it is infinitely to their loss, that they do not serve him in that solemn way that Christ hath appointed. For they have not the same reason to expect God's blessing in their way, supposing they did seriously endeavour it, because they do not take the method he hath prescribed for the obtaining it, and besides they live in a direct contradiction to the laws of the gospel.

But, thirdly, let us go a step further. Admit that Christ had laid no such great stress upon these public means, but we were perfectly at liberty whether we would make use of them or no, yet, whether would not the necessities of our own souls require that we should at least set apart one day in seven for the purpose of devotion and religion, if ever we meant to preserve in ourselves any sense of piety? and consequently, when the Lord's day is thus by God and man consecrated to that business, whether it is not every man's interest, as well as his duty, most strictly and religiously to observe it? I pray consider that in this hurry of worldly affairs, the business in which we are all engaged; in this constant road of worldly objects, which we every minute converse with, and the continual temptations upon the account thereof we are exposed to; I say, pray think how it is possible for a man (be he never so well disposed) to preserve in himself a sense of God or religion, unless he takes times for frequent recollection, and abstracting

himself from all material objects, and applying his thoughts to God and spiritual things. If we would live to any great purpose, it is fit we should do it every day; but yet mankind cannot be brought to this. It is very well, if we can but rescue so much time from our other affairs, that we can afford half an hour in our closets to God in the morning, and as much in the evening: I say, even this is very well; but yet I am afraid a great many do not do this. God help us, in what a miserable condition are we in the mean while! Assuredly our souls do require the use of spiritual exercises, such as prayer and reading and meditation, in order to the keeping them alive towards God, every whit as much as our bodies do require the use of meat and drink, in order to the preserving natural life. And yet so besotted are we by the objects of sense, that we can neither find time, nor be in humour for these things. Is it not therefore happy for us, that since we cannot, or will not, in this crowd of business take care of our souls ourselves, that God hath taken such care of us, that whether we will or no, we shall be obliged to spend one day in seven for the benefit and advantage of our souls; that while we are all the week working and labouring for the body, one day may be appropriated to their use and service?

I say, it is a happy institution, and we should all be undone if it was not thus. We should all, notwithstanding our little devotions on the week days, unavoidably sink into carelessness and sensuality, and unconcernedness for God and religion, were it not that there is every week a day appointed for us, wholly to apply our minds to these spiritual matters, and to consider what we have done amiss, and what

it is our great interest to pursue; and to revive our good resolutions, and fortify ourselves against the temptations we are continually exposed to.

Sure I am, that all persons that do seriously apply themselves to God and virtue are deeply sensible of the truth of this. They find, that notwithstanding their private devotions in their closets, notwithstanding their reading the scripture and other good books, the taking all opportunities likewise that they have of resorting to public prayers on the week days; I say, they find, notwithstanding all this, that they have need enough of the Sunday institution for the keeping their mind in a good frame; and they are so far from looking upon it as an oppression when it comes, that they esteem it the best and the most delightful, as well as the most desirable day in the week.

O, therefore, if we have any concernment for our own souls, if we have any desire that the work of God (I mean that work that tends to our eternal salvation) should prosper in our hands, let us make a conscience of strictly and religiously observing the Lord's day, to those purposes it was designed for.

But then, in the fourth place, I have another thing to say upon this argument: we are not only bound upon our own account, and for our own benefit, to this observation of the Lord's day, but also upon a more public account, even for the sake of the religion we do profess, our common Christianity I mean: of which the observation of the Lord's day is one of the greatest supports and preservatives.

I look upon this appointment of the Lord's day to have been one of the great means that hath preserved the Christian religion to this day in the world,

and to be the great security for the continuance of it among us. And if it was laid aside, I can hardly imagine there would be a face of religion kept up among us for many years together, but in a few generations we should all turn heathen. When I speak here of the appointment of the Lord's day, I would not have you think that I lay any stress upon the appointment of the day; but it is the work, the business that is to be done on that day, that I lay weight upon.

The design of setting apart that day is, that all men should join in the solemn worship of God; that they should be instructed in the doctrines of the gospel; that they should be taught from God's word what they are to believe, and what they are to practise, in order to their salvation; that they should have the motives and arguments that the gospel offers, for their living a holy Christian life, fairly proposed to them; that they should have an opportunity seriously of thinking upon these things and examining the state of their own souls, and making new resolutions of living according to their Christian profession; and humbly imploring the grace of God that they may practise what they do resolve.

This, I say, is the proper business of the Lord's day; and taking it thus, were it not for this public establishment of the Lord's day, I doubt whether it would be possible, humanly speaking, to preserve the Christian religion in the world; for were not people obliged to worship God frequently, and to hear their duty told them, and that duty pressed upon them by all the arguments that can prevail upon human nature; I say, were not this constantly used and practised among us, I cannot see but that in time we should fall back to paganism.

But it will perhaps be thrown in our dish, that we have little reason to brag of the good effects of our Sunday preachments, for people are now no better than they always were, and that is bad enough: and of those that frequent our assemblies, more come out of custom and curiosity, than for any end of devotion. I answer, if people do not grow better, it is a very great blessing of God that they do not grow worse; and I am sure that is owing in a great measure to the keeping up the religion of Sundays.

If we are generally so bad, even when we have so many excellent means afforded us for growing better, and we are forced, in compliance with the custom of the country, to make a show of using those means; how bad, think you, should we be, if we had none of those means, or, having them, never pretend to make use of them!

If a man continue an atheist, or a hypocrite, or a whoremonger, or a drunkard, when yet he comes every Sunday to church, and there confesseth his sins, and begs God's pardon, and cannot avoid the hearing many terrible things denounced in the word of God against him so long as he continues in his sins; do you think he would not be a ten times worse atheist, or drunkard, or whoremonger, if he never came to church at all, but so spent his time that he should never have any thing of religion, not perhaps the very name of it, sounding in his ears? Never therefore talk of what little reformation there is among us, for all our coming to church, and how many come, whether to serve other ends than those of religion; for assuredly it is foolish talk, if you mean thereby to discourage people from that prac-

tice: a great many, undoubtedly, do receive infinite benefits by their thus doing. Those that are virtuously disposed are undoubtedly hereby rendered more virtuous; those that are viciously disposed, a great many of them, no doubt, are in time, and by degrees, brought off by the use of these means from their dissolute and wicked course, and wrought to a better mind. And as for those that give no visible signs of amendment, and yet frequent our churches, as for them, I say, nevertheless, great reason have they to thank God, both for his appointing these weekly days for his worship, and likewise for his keeping them from that impudence in sinning, that they do not despise Sundays, but will on those days come to church, and do as their neighbours do. For certainly, though they do not grow better hereby, yet by using these means they are kept from growing worse. And if they should give themselves over to the total neglect or disuse of these public exercises of piety, good God! to what a deplorable condition would they in time reduce themselves! Whoever therefore hath any serious desire, either that men should grow better, or that they should not grow worse; whoever hath any hearty concern for religion and piety, and would not have it quite banished out of the world; every such man must needs be convinced, that it is of infinite concernment that the strict observation of the Lord's day should be most religiously kept up among us.

I have one thing more to add upon this point, and I have done.

In the fifth place, if these arguments I have insisted on will not prevail with you to make a conscience of strictly observing the Lord's day, yet, I

beg of you, let other people's experience do it. When reason doth not prevail, we appeal to experience; and in this matter I appeal to all men that have made trial of it.

And these two things I account all men that have made trial will give their assent to.

First of all, whoever makes a conscience of strictly observing the Lord's day, (supposing he doth it not out of hypocrisy, but bears an honest mind towards God; I say, every such person,) never failed to grow in virtue and goodness. God always accepted his services; and he finds the good effects of them in the greater measure of grace and strength that is afforded to him for the living a holy and virtuous life.

Nay, some devout persons have extended this point further; they will tell you that they have always observed, that as they kept the Lord's day more or less carefully, so has their business prospered more or less successfully all the week after; and that they have particularly experienced, over and over again, that when they have most fervently set themselves to serve God on Sunday, they have been remarkably blessed the following week.

But, secondly, it hath been hardly known that any one that was a notorious sabbath-breaker (which is the word we usually express such offenders by) ever came to good. Those persons that make no conscience of observing the Lord's day, as they rarely ever attain to a true sense of virtue and piety, so most commonly they are given over to a reprobate mind, and do grow worse and worse.

And this thing is very observable, that most of these lewd and profligate people that have run into all sorts of extravagancies, when they come at their

death to reflect on their lives past, and to give an account of what led them into all those excesses and wickednesses, the most common thing that they impute all to, was, their not observing the Lord's day. But, when they should have been at the church they gave themselves up to idle and vicious company, that by degrees perverted their manners, and drew them into these mischiefs which it is now too late to redress.

These things, I think, may be sufficient to possess you all with a hearty sense of the obligation that is upon us strictly to observe the Lord's day. I dare not stay to enforce this further.

I pray God give us all grace that we may so serve him here, both on this day and all the other days of our life, that hereafter we may be partakers of his eternal glory.

A SERMON

ON

HEBREWS IV. 11.

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest.

I TAKE it for granted, that all that now hear me do believe a future state; and that we do not cease to be when we leave this world, but that we must live for ever either in happiness or misery.

I take it for granted, that none here doubts but that there doth remain a rest for the people of God in the other world; and therefore this point I wholly wave, and shall not trouble you with offering at a proof of it.

My present business is to do what I can to persuade you all to the practice of the apostle's exhortation in my text, to wit, to *labour to enter into that rest*, in shewing you that it is a rest exceedingly worth our labouring for; that it doth richly deserve all the diligence and pains and application that we can possibly bestow towards the obtaining of it, because when it is obtained it will abundantly compensate for them all.

Now you see that in order to the speaking justly to this point, I am obliged to enter into a discourse of the excellency of this rest, and to give some account of the many blessings that are contained in it.

And I hope nobody will think this to be an improper argument at this season, since it was the great business and end of our Saviour's death and

passion (which we commemorate this week) to procure this eternal rest for us, and the great business of our Lord's resurrection (which we are to commemorate the next week) to assure us that he hath effectually done it; and that he will one day raise us up to partake of that glory which he now possesses at the right hand of God.

To come then to my business, to give some account of the many blessings that are contained in that rest which our Saviour hath purchased for us. And O that I could do it so effectually, that we might all fall in love with it; that we could so affect our minds with the solid happiness of the other world, that we might be quite put out of conceit with the trifles and vanities of this; that we might leave our fondness for these earthly tabernacles, these dark prisons, wherein our souls are confined, and groan after the glorious liberties of the sons of God, and those heavenly regions wherein God and angels do enjoy themselves in the fulness of blessedness for evermore.

But who is sufficient to declare the great things that God hath laid up for those that love him? The apostle tells us, that *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive* of them. And therefore little can it be expected that any words of ours should describe them.

Alas! we are much in the dark about these matters; *we know not yet what we shall be*, as St. John has told us. We understand not a thousandth part of the circumstances that will contribute to the bliss of good men in that other state; but though our conceptions, as to these matters, be very narrow and

scanty, and God hath not thought fit to reveal his good pleasure, as to the particularities of this state, yet so much hath he been pleased to discover to us concerning it, and so much we are able to understand of those discoveries, that it will not be an useless undertaking to give some general account or description of it.

And here we must be careful not to indulge our own fancies, nor to take our estimate of that state from such notions of happiness as we are too often apt in this world to take up. But we must keep close to the divine revelation: if we steer ourselves by any other compass, every man will form such ideas of heaven as suit best with his present desires and humours and inclinations; and then it will be the Elysian fields, or the rabbin's garden of Eden, or the paradise of Mahomet, or any kind of thing that will give satisfaction to a man's sensual appetite.

With some it will consist in victory and triumphs over their enemies; with others it will be stately palaces, and crowns upon their heads, and sceptres in their hands, and every thing that tends to the gratifying their worldly and ambitious desires.

With others it will be the most delicious eating and drinking, and all manner of corporal pleasure; and lastly, with others, it will be a lazy unactive life of gazing and contemplation.

It will concern us therefore, whenever we think or speak of that happy state, to form our thoughts and our notions according to those measures that God hath given us in the holy scriptures, and not rashly to conceive any thing of it but what we have warrant for, either directly, or by consequence from

the discoveries that are there made. This therefore I shall take as my rule in the discoursing of this matter.

And here the first thing that offers itself to our consideration is, the term by which it is expressed in my text, namely, *a rest*, taking that word in the most usual signification.

Rest, when it is applied to man, what is it but a ceasing from all toil and trouble, a freedom from every thing that is uneasy and afflicting? Whoever is at perfect rest is at perfect ease, is in that state which the Stoics call indolency.

Now such a rest is the state of good men in the other life; not a state of idleness and doing nothing, but a state that is perfectly free from all pain and trouble and disquietness. It is a life of perfect peace, a refreshment after all our labours and sufferings, by which term the scripture sometimes expresseth it.

There will be then nothing to disturb us, or cause any allay or interruption to our quiet. All those things that were apt to ruffle or discompose our spirits, while we were tossed upon the sea of this world, will then be far removed from us, and we shall find a perfect calm both within and without us.

This is indeed the sum of all that can be said upon this head; but yet, methinks, I would not dismiss it so.

It will excite our desires after that rest, to think a little more particularly of the evils from which it will set us free; and therefore give me leave to dilate a little upon this head.

We shall then rest from sinning and offending

God, which is now one of the greatest troubles of our lives. O what would not a good man give, that he might always so govern himself as to perform a constant, steady, uniform obedience to the laws of his heavenly Father! But yet such, alas! is the infelicity of this present state, that even the best of men do offend in many things, and have their bitter reflections upon themselves for those offences. But the other state we are speaking of will perfectly set us free from this; we shall not any more displease God, nor behave ourselves ungratefully or unkindly to him; we shall not any more have need of sorrow and tears for our daily miscarriages; we shall not any more complain of the hardness of our hearts, or our unfruitfulness under the means of grace, or our frequent lapses and infirmities.

But we shall be holy as we desire, and Christ will present us to his Father *without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing*, pure and without blemish. We shall then also rest from all the temptations and allurements to sin, with which we are here continually assaulted. All the rubs and stumblingblocks which are thrown in our way by the Devil or the world will then be taken away. We shall not then have the trouble of being always upon our guard, always watching over ourselves, always conflicting with dangers and difficulties, always in fear lest the enemy should surprise us, or be too strong for us; for our warfare will then be over, we shall have finished our course, and no tempter, no adversary shall from henceforward have access to us. We shall then also rest from all doubts and suspicions of our own state. We shall not then any longer call our own sincerity into question, or be in fear lest our

sins should not be pardoned; or that God should withdraw his grace from us, and leave us to ourselves; or that we are not yet arrived to that degree of virtue and holiness and piety that our religion requires of us.

For then our own senses will convince us that those jealousies are vain, and that God is infinitely good, and we everlastingly happy. We shall then rest from all our divisions and quarrels one with another, which in this state, it is to be feared, even good men do sometimes too zealously pursue. There will then be no parties or factions; one will not say he is of Paul, another of Apollos, but we shall all lay aside our heats and animosities, which our different educations, and our different ways of thinking, and our too much accepting of some men's persons, may unhappily have engaged us in. And we shall be all of one mind and one soul, and embrace one another with open arms and a hearty love, and be perfectly one household, under that one shepherd the Lord Jesus.

We shall then rest from all that grief and trouble we now undergo upon account of other folk's misfortunes. As the present state of things is, to see or hear of the misery of others, though we ourselves are in good circumstances, must make a good natured man very uneasy. Whoever hath any bowels of humanity in him cannot but be very melancholy at the dismal spectacles that are every day presented to our eyes; to see some ready to starve for want of bread, others languishing under great pains of body; to see one near relation ruined by cross and sad accidents, another taking bad courses, and growing atheistical and profane: in a word, to converse

every day with miserable persons, as in truth the world is nothing but a great hospital of such; I say, the reflections upon these things must needs make our lives very uncomfortable, though our condition otherwise be never so prosperous.

But in the other state we shall have none of these objects before us, we shall have no use of our pity and compassion, but all that we converse with will be happy as ourselves. And as for those that our gracious God hath justly punished for their obstinate wickedness and impenitence, we shall be so infinitely satisfied of the fitness and reasonableness and equity of his dealings with them, that we shall have no more concern for them than if they were not in being.

We shall then rest from all the labour and toil of our employments, which is now one great part of the curse derived upon us from our first parents. We shall not then earn our living with the sweat of our brows, nor exhaust our spirits in doing such drudgeries as our callings do here necessarily require of us. All the care, and the pains, and the burden we undergo, in the providing for our families, in the bringing up our children, in the despatching our business, and all the anxiety and solicitude we have about those things, will then be at an end. And we shall live free from all manner of tormenting thoughtfulness, and be able to enjoy ourselves, and dispose of our time according to our own desires.

Lastly, to conclude this point, we shall then rest from all our personal sufferings and afflictions, from all troubles and inconveniences, and ill accidents, that this mortal state doth expose us to; we shall then be free from all manner of sickness and diseases,

from hunger and thirst, from poverty and nakedness, from every thing that causeth grief and pain. We shall then be no longer obnoxious to the treachery of our friends, nor the malice of our enemies, nor the idle slanderous reports of backbiters; we shall then be quit of all our troublesome passions and appetites, such as anger, and fear, and grief, and immoderate love of any thing. We shall then be out of danger of disappointments as to our designs, or loss of our goods, or death of our dear friends, or the oppression and tyranny of hard masters: in a word, we shall be in a perfect rest from all discontents, from every thing that renders our condition in the least troublesome. And all our past sufferings will be no further remembered by us, than only as the remembrance of them contributes to the increase of our joy and delight. And now is not such a state of life as this which I have been now describing infinitely desirable? Will it not abundantly answer all the pains and labour that we can be at for the acquisition of it? And yet this that I have named is the least part of the happiness of the other state. I have hitherto considered that state only in a negative way, as it is a rest from our labours, which is the term by which my text expresseth it: so that indeed I have rather told you what it is not, than what it is. But I shall now come to consider it with respect to those positive blessings which make up the happiness of it. Which shall be the second part of my Discourse.

And here several things do present themselves to our consideration, as, first of all, the great change for the better that shall then be made to the persons of good men.

Secondly, the glory of the place where they shall have their abode.

Thirdly, the agreeable company they shall there converse with.

Fourthly, the delightful employment in which they will spend their time.

And, fifthly, the unspeakable favours and communications of God to their souls.

Of all these as briefly as I can; still taking the holy scriptures for our guide.

And first, as for the vast improvement that good men shall find in that state as to their persons, it is enough to say, that both their souls and their bodies shall then be advanced to the highest perfection that they are capable of.

And first of all, that their souls will be so is plain beyond contradiction from those words of the apostle, Heb. xii. 23. where, describing the heavenly Jerusalem, and the inhabitants thereof, he calls those of mankind that shall have a place there, *the spirits of just men made perfect.*

But what is it to have our spirits made perfect? Wherein doth this perfection consist? Why, we all know there are two principal faculties in our souls, the understanding and the will; and to these two all our other powers are reduced. So that when these two are arrived to their full perfections, our souls or spirits are made as perfect as they can be.

Now as to the understanding, the perfection of that consists only in the comprehension and knowledge of truth, as that of the will doth in the choice and love of that which is good: so that then are our souls or spirits made perfect, when they know and understand as much as their capacities will allow them;

and when they are carried out with the most fervent desire and love towards the greatest good. And both these perfections will the souls of good men be advanced to in the other world.

First, they shall be perfected in knowledge. Here in this world, as the apostle tells us, 1 Cor. xiii. *we know but in part; we understand but as children; we see but as through a glass, darkly.* It is but very little that we do understand; and that little that we do, it is but imperfectly, obscurely, confusedly.

All that we know of God, and those other most glorious objects, (which it is most our interest and happiness to know,) is but as it were in a picture, or by reflection, as from a glass. But as the apostle goes on, when from children in this world we come to be men of the other world, *then that which is in part shall be done away*, and in that state we shall see *face to face, and know even as we are known;* that is, we shall know fully and evidently, we shall know God, and all those infinite other objects which we desire to contemplate, as we know those that we look upon and converse with; as we ourselves are known to others, not by our picture, but by being personally seen by them, and acquainted with them. And as our understanding will be thus made perfect in knowledge, so our wills also will be made perfect in love; this indeed being a natural consequence of that. For our minds having so thorough a comprehension and perception of God's infinite loveliness and perfections, as they will have in that state, cannot but represent him to us as the greatest good and the most amiable object in the world. And hereupon we cannot avoid the cleaving to him with our

whole hearts, and shall find the greatest pleasure and satisfaction that is possible in so doing. All our grosser loves will be quite burnt up in this new fire that will be kindled in our breasts; we shall see such an infinite, inexhaustible treasure of good in God, that we shall love, and admire, and delight in him, incomparably more than in any other good in the world. Nay, we shall love so long, and so intensely, until our souls be quite transformed into the nature of our beloved; until we become as like God as it is possible for creatures to be: his will will be our will, his perfections will be our perfections, and we shall in a manner be one with him; and this is the perfection of love. But, secondly, as our spirits or our souls will be made perfect, so will also our bodies. Reason indeed will tell us, that no earthly gross bodies (such as ours now are) can be fit instruments to serve the soul in such exalted operations as these we have been now speaking of: but God hath not left us to the bare conjecture of reason in this matter; he hath assured us by his apostle, that when that time comes we shall be cloathed upon with an heavenly tabernacle, 2 Cor. v. And again, in the fifteenth of the First of Corinthians, that we shall have spiritual immutable bodies; because such flesh and blood as we now have is not capable of entering into the kingdom of God, as he there tells us. But that by which we may best judge of the perfection of our bodies in that day is what St. Paul tells us in his Epistle to the Philippians, chap. iii. 21; namely, that Christ will then fashion our bodies like unto his glorious body; that is to say, we shall then have such bodies as our Saviour now hath, that he sits at the right hand of God. Now how bright and illustrious

that is, will in some measure appear from what the apostles saw at his transfiguration, and St. Paul afterwards, when our Saviour appeared to him in order to his conversion; so glorious was the splendour of it, that it was insupportable to their mortal senses. The apostles were put into an ecstasy, and St. Paul was struck blind for three days: flesh and blood could not bear the glory of it. Yet such bodies as these, the apostle assures us, our souls shall be cloathed with at the resurrection; bodies as bright and glorious as the light; bodies as pure as the regions are where we are to inhabit; bodies so nimble and agile that our souls may move them whither and how we please, nor will they be the least clog or encumbrance to us. But come we, in the second place, to speak something of the mansions where blessed souls are to inhabit. In what part of the vast creation of God those mansions are placed, or this country is situated, we do not know.

But sure we are they are in the purest regions of the world; sure we are they are out of the stench and vapour of this corruptible earth; because sure we are that they are in heaven. Nay, as the scripture tells us, *the highest heaven*, or, as St. Paul expresseth it, *the third heaven*. But wherever this country is, that which may give us infinite satisfaction that it is the most happy, the most delightful, the most glorious country in the world, is this consideration, that here it is that God keeps his court and manifests his glory, and here it is that our Lord Jesus in person dwells. For that all good Christians shall go to that place where Christ keeps his personal residence is very clear from St. Paul, who wisheth that he may be out of this body, that he may

be with Christ; but most of all from our Saviour's own words, (John xiv. 2, 3.) *In my Father's house,* saith he, *there are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there you may be also.* Now where is it that Christ now is, but at the right hand of God; in that place which is here called *the house of God,* and elsewhere *the throne of God?* in that place where God doth after a peculiar manner exhibit and shew forth his glory: that place therefore is the happy country that good souls shall go to at the end of the world. It is true, God, as to his essence, is not in one place more than another, for he fills all places, and is equally present in all places in the world; but yet this doth not hinder but that he may manifest himself to others more in one place than another. He hath often done so, as the scripture informs us; witness, to Moses in the burning bush, to all the elders of Israel at the giving of the law. All these at that time (as the text tells us) did see the God of Israel. And thus, we say, he doth continually manifest himself in that part of the world where our Saviour, as to his human nature, dwells; namely, in an external and visible manner. Hence it is that that place is called *the throne of his glory,* and *the light inaccessible to mortal men.* And that is one reason why our Saviour describes the happiness of heaven by this phrase, of *seeing of God,* and St. Paul, of *seeing him face to face;* not that God can be seen by bodily eyes, for God is a perfect spirit, and falls not under the perception of corporal senses. One may as well talk of seeing a sound, as of seeing

God in the literal sense of seeing. But this is the meaning of those expressions, (at least one part of their meaning,) that God, in that part of heaven where our Lord Jesus dwells, will be pleased to reveal himself in so much majesty, with such illustrious and magnificent appearances, even to the very senses of good men, that they shall be filled with ineffable joy and delight; and perceive, by the glory that they see, that God hath his residence there. And now must it not be a place beyond all imagination glorious, where the King of the world keeps his court, and where he never ceaseth to display the full beams of his majesty to the senses of all his happy subjects? Must it not be a happy country which, besides all the natural beauties and pleasures of it, is adorned with the illustrious presence of the Son of God, who, after all his sufferings, and all his combats with the kingdom of darkness, is there triumphantly set as in the fulness of power and glory, and made governor and Lord both of angels and men? Yet no worse a place than this will fall to the share of all good Christians for ever to dwell in; no meaner a presence than this shall they ever stand before; no less a glory than this shall they ever behold and be enravished with: *Father*, saith our Saviour, *I will that those that thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.*

But, thirdly, that which will render the condition of good men in that state still more happy, is, the excellent company they shall converse with; for as they *are come unto mount Sion*, (that I may use the apostle's language,) as they are come *unto the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to God the Judge of all, to Jesus the mediator of the new*

covenant, (of which we have already spoken,) so (as the apostle goes on) they are come *to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, written in heaven, to the spirits of just men made perfect*, Heb. xii. 22. There is the general rendezvous of all angels and all good souls; there they live in one family, and converse in the most familiar manner, and embrace one another with the most tender love. There is no solitude there, no strangeness to one another, no selfishness and narrowness of soul, but the communion of saints is in full perfection. There we shall know and be known, love and be beloved by the gracious sons of light, the holy angels of God; who, in the days of our pilgrimage here, did us many good offices that we never knew of; who, whenever any sinner of us is converted from his evil ways, rejoice at it in heaven; but will then much more rejoice, when we come to be partakers of their glory and of their conversation. There we shall rejoice in company of the patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles, and martyrs, and all those burning and shining lights in the world, whose zeal for God and his religion, in their several generations, hath embalmed their names and memories amongst all good men. Lastly, there shall we meet and embrace all our righteous friends and acquaintance, whose deaths we so much regretted. There we shall again possess our husbands, our wives, our children, that died in the fear of God; for whom we have always been so much concerned, and whose loss (as we called it) was so very grievous to us: in a word, all those good people whom we loved, and whose company was ever dear to us, shall then be again restored to us, or rather we to them; and so

restored as never to be separated any more, but to dwell together in perfect peace and joy, to enjoy one another to eternity, with all the endearments of love and friendship without fear, without care, without envy or jealousy, or any other perturbation. And now how transporting a consideration must this needs be to all those that have any sense of the pleasure that arises from friendship and agreeable conversation! Who can ever be weary of such company? or rather, who will not be so weary and unsatisfied with the short imperfect enjoyment we have of one another in this world, that he will not long to be admitted into that happy society above?

Cicero, though a heathen, was so affected with the thoughts of these things, (which yet he had no stronger grounds for the belief of, but what natural reason suggested to him,) that he cries out, in the person of Cato, to this purpose, (the words are wonderful, to be spoken by a heathen.)

"O how I long," saith he," to see and be present "with those friends of mine departed, whom I have "so much loved and honoured! nor is it them only "that I have known, that I desire to go to, but all "those brave men I have heard of, and read of, and "writ of. If I were once a going thither, none should "draw me back; if God should offer to restore me "to my youth, and to begin the world again, I "would resolutely refuse it; for what advantage is "there in this life? or rather, what pain and trouble "is there not? O happy day, when I shall depart "from this sink of the world, from this unquiet tu-"multuous company, and go to dwell with the as-"sembly and congregation of divine souls!" Thus far Cicero.

But, fourthly, pass we on from the company that good men shall have in the other state, to the manner of life they there lead, the employments in which they spend their days. And here, though we are much to seek as to particulars, yet in general we may be sure they are such as are suitable to such perfect natures, and very becoming the place where they live, and the presence of that God before whom they stand, and the excellent company with which they do converse. We need not doubt but that all the powers, both of their souls and bodies, are employed to the best ends, and the most excellent manner they are capable of. It is not a dull inactive life they lead there ; but as all their faculties are unconceivably enlarged, and rendered most sprightly and vigorous, so there is a new world of objects to employ and entertain them, and that to their unexpressible satisfaction. Whether they exercise their understanding in the discovery of new mines of truth, in contemplating the infinite perfections of God, in considering the admirable contrivance of his works, in searching out the stupendous mysteries of his holy word, in pleasing themselves with the speculations of the eternal goodness and righteousness of his laws, and the exact order and regularity of his government of the world.

Or whether they exercise their wills in acts of the most ardent love and devotion, and adherence to God, and of the tenderest charity to all his creatures; or whether they exercise their memories in repeating to themselves all the occurrences of their life past, and how graciously every event of their lives was ordered and managed by God's providence for their own good, and the good of the world; or whether they exercise their eyes in viewing and contemplat-

ing the infinite variety of the creation, and the magnificence of every part of it; or whether they exercise their tongues and ears in telling and hearing the rare dispensations of God's providence in all parts of the world, from the beginning to the end thereof; or, lastly, whether they exercise their whole man in solemn acts of worship and adoration, and in receiving orders from God, and readily putting them in execution, as the angels of God do; I say, in all these instances, the employment will be exceedingly delightful, and will fill them with inexpressible joy and satisfaction. But of all the other works they exercise themselves in, that of praise and thanksgiving is in the scripture taken notice of as their peculiar office and constant employment in that state: *They cease not day and night to cry out, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come,* Rev. iv. 8. There they *fall down and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created,* Rev. iv. 11. There they chaunt forth the praises of the Lamb, saying, *Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. For he hath redeemed us to God by his blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hath made us unto our God kings and priests,* Rev. v. There *they sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty: just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for*

thou only art holy, Rev. xv. 3. And now consider what pleasant, what cheerful lives they must needs lead that are always thus employed. If in this dull state, where our souls are sunk down into the very dregs of matter, and are thereby become in a great measure insensible of God's infinite perfections, and the unvaluable supplies and favours which we do every minute receive from him, and are very difficultly brought to raise up our thoughts and affections to him; I say, if in this state it be yet so good a thing to *sing praises unto God*, so joyful and pleasant a thing to be thankful, as David expresseth it, O how delightful will it be to send forth his praises when we find ourselves in perfect freedom and liveliness! when our souls can spread forth their wings in the vast regions of light and glory; when we have a full view of the excellencies of God, and of his astonishing goodness; when we can take a just estimate of all the blessings that he hath heaped upon us all our lives long; when we can look back upon all the dangers we have escaped, all the favours of God to us, while we were in this troublesome world, and at the same time look into our present happy state that he hath put us into, and look forwards also to those rivers of pleasure that are before us, and will never cease to flow upon us from that inexhaustible spring of goodness. O how transporting will this be to us! how will our hearts be melted into love and joy, and how will that joy break forth, and express itself in the most rapturous and never-ceasing praises!

But, fifthly and lastly, to conclude; as another addition to the happiness of that state, let us further

consider the ineffable communications that God will then be pleased to make to the souls of good men. These in scripture are set forth to us under several sorts of expressions. Good men shall then enjoy God, and they shall be his sons, and they shall inherit all things: *They shall drink of his pleasures as out of the river; they shall know the love of God which passeth knowledge; and they shall be filled with all the fulness of God.* And, lastly, the same thing our Saviour principally seems to intend when he describes the happiness of the other life, in the term of *seeing God;* it is true, as I said before, God doth in that state exhibit his glory and majesty to his people in a visible manner, to their very eyes and senses. Which appearance or representation is that which the Jews call the *shechinah*, or God's dwelling among his people. But though in this case good men may be truly said *to see God*, yet that phrase contains a great deal more in it. For *to see God*, in the scripture language, is to enjoy him; to receive such favours from him as he will be pleased to communicate unto us in that holy place where he dwells; to have a participation with him in his blessedness; for *to see*, in the scripture phrase, is the same thing as to enjoy. Thus, *to see good days*, in the thirty-fourth Psalm, is to possess them, to lead a happy life. To *see life*, and to *see the kingdom of God*, is to be put into the enjoyment of those blessings. To *see God* then is something more than to dwell whole ages in gazing upon some outward appearance or manifestation of God's presence, (in which yet several have been so sensual as to place the whole of the beatific vision;) it is to have

real enjoyment of him, and as sensibly to perceive him; to be as pleasingly and delightfully affected with him, as we do perceive, or are affected with any good in this world: in a word, it is to be made partakers of all God's perfections as far as our capacities will bear; and to receive such vital communication from his infinite love and goodness, as will make us really and substantially and eternally happy, like as he himself is.

And now I have said as much as I can in the little time that is allowed me; but I have not said, neither can we think the thousandth part of the blessedness and happiness of those good souls that God thinks worthy of receiving into his kingdom. It is enough to say it is unmeasurable and everlasting as God himself is. Now blessed, for ever blessed be God, who hath prepared such wonderful things for them that love him: blessed be our Lord Jesus, who hath made known to us the certainty of them, and taught us the way how we may attain them: blessed be the holy Spirit of God, who, if we be not wanting to ourselves, will not fail to conduct us safely to them, in making us meet to be partakers of this inheritance of the saints in light.

O let us rejoice and be glad all the days of our life! O let us quit all our little trifling designs, and set ourselves in good earnest to the purchasing this *pearl of great price!* O let us make it the business and design of our lives to labour to enter into this rest, which, as you see, is a rest so extremely worth our labouring for!

" And thou, O blessed God, who hast prepared for " them that love thee such good things as pass man's

" understanding, pour into our hearts such love to-
" wards thee, that we, loving thee above all things,
" may obtain thy gracious promises, which exceed
" all that we can desire, through Jesus Christ our
" Lord." To whom, &c.

A SERMON

PREACHED OCTOBER 5, 1690.

JAMES V. 12.

But above all things, my brethren, swear not.

I HAVE chosen these words of St. James for my argument, which are as exactly levelled against the sin of profane swearing as words can be: *Above all things*, saith he, *my brethren, swear not.* Sure that must not be a little thing concerning which such words as these are used to dissuade us from it. Sure, an apostle of Christ, that was inspired by the Holy Ghost, would not have said, *Above all things* have a care of such a sin, unless that sin had been of a more than ordinary malignity; nay, unless it had been a sin of the most heinous nature. And yet it is no other sin than swearing; that sin which is so common, and which is generally thought so small a matter among all sorts of people, that is here forbid in so earnest and so solemn a manner.

But before I come to that I mainly design from my text, it is fit I should give you some explication of it, and vindicate it from such false glosses as some among us are wont to put upon it. You know there are a sect of men in our days that hold all swearing utterly unlawful; and, agreeably to their principles, they refuse to give their promise or their

testimony upon oath, in all cases whatsoever, though never so much by law required to it. The great thing they urge for this principle is this text of St. James I have now read unto you, and the other text of our Saviour, in the fifth of St. Matthew. Our Saviour there saith, verse the thirty-fourth, *Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool:* and so on; *but let your conversation be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.* St. James here saith, *Above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest you fall into condemnation.* How, say they, can words be invented that shall more effectually forbid all sorts of oaths whatsoever, and in what cases soever, than these words do? And suitably thereunto several of the primitive fathers, say they, have utterly condemned the whole practice of oaths among Christians.

I must confess, this that they urge doth, at the first sight, seem very plausible, and would really stumble an honest-minded man that looks no further than the bare sound of words. I hope therefore I shall not misspend either my time or my labour, if I endeavour to give a plain account of this matter.

Two things, therefore, I propose to do upon this text:

First, To explain the meaning of this prohibition of swearing, and to shew that neither Christ nor his apostles did intend hereby to forbid the use of oaths in all cases, but only in some.

Secondly, To reprove from hence that extravagant, ungodly practice (too much in use among us) of

swearing in our ordinary conversation; which indeed is the only thing here forbidden.

I begin with the first of these points, (which will be sufficient for your entertainment at this time,) to give an account of those prohibitions about swearing, and to shew that they were never designed to be extended to all swearing whatsoever, but only to swearing in some cases.

And here I have three things to offer: first, the words themselves do not require such a general sense.

Secondly, the practice both of our Lord and his apostles do evidently shew that no such sense was intended by them; to which I shall add, in the

Third place, some other considerations which do further clear this matter.

I am now to prove against the Quakers that all swearing is not unlawful, nor can it be concluded from these texts. Now, in order to this, let us consider these texts.

And I first begin with our Saviour's law, in the fifth chapter of St. Matthew, which indeed is the original from whence St. James copies: *I say unto you*, saith our Saviour, *Swear not at all.* It is a general and uncontested rule in the interpreting of scripture and all other writings, that the scope of the author, and the subject-matter of his discourse, is to fix and limit the sense of all his propositions; so that though a proposition be seemingly universal, yet it is to be extended no further than the subject-matter that then is treated about. Thus, for instance, these two propositions, *Take no thought for your lives; Be careful for nothing*, are as general and universal as words can make them; but yet, it

is certain, all care and thoughtfulness is not here forbid, but only that which is spent about food or raiment, and such like worldly things, because that is the subject-matter of our Saviour's discourse in these texts. If therefore it doth appear that when our Saviour saith in this place, *Swear not at all*, the subject-matter of his discourse is not all oaths whatsoever, but only oaths of one sort; that is to say, voluntary oaths, and such kind of voluntary oaths too as were customarily sworn in common conversation; I say, if this do appear, then certainly his forbidding of all swearing is not to be extended to all oaths whatsoever, but is to be limited to such oaths as these.

Premising this, I come now to give an account of the passage. You are to know that the Jews, in our Saviour's days, were generally faulty as to this business of oaths, in two respects:

First of all, they accounted no swearing directly unlawful, but false swearing.

If a man did but swear that which was true, or made good that which he swore he would do, they accounted him no transgressor of the commandment, though he often made use of oaths where he needed not: for the commandment, as they understood it, was only against perjury. The commandment was, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain;* that is, as Moses himself interprets it, Lev. xix. *Thou shalt not swear by my name falsely;* or, as our Saviour here expresseth it, *Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform thy oaths unto the Lord:* for undoubtedly it is the third commandment that our Saviour here hath reference to.

Secondly, they had another odd notion about

swearing: they would swear frequently by the creatures; as by the heavens, by the earth, by Jerusalem, and the like; and this they accounted no swearing at all; that is, they did not account it perjury if such oaths were false, or were not performed. Thus one of their own authors: "If any," saith he, "swear "by the heaven, or by the earth, or by the sun, or "the like, although the mind of the swearer be "under those words to swear by him that created "them, yet this is not an oath."

These, I say, were their generally received principles about swearing, as doth yet appear by their books. Now our Saviour, who came to give a perfect law of holiness and religion to mankind, seeing of what mischievous consequences these notions and practices were; how much the name of God was brought into contempt, and the religion of an oath was profaned by them; takes care in this sermon on the mount to give his disciples better instructions about these things; and as he had just before been improving the sixth commandment about murder, and the seventh about adultery, to higher instances of duty than the letter of those commandments required, so he now comes to do the same with the third commandment about swearing.

And thus he begins his discourse upon this argument, in the thirty-third verse of this fifth chapter of St. Matthew: *Again, ye have heard,* saith he, *that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:* (there is the letter of the third commandment:) *but I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool:*

neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thine head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. Two things our Saviour here improves as to this commandment: first, whereas the letter of it did only forbid false swearing, (at least the Jews then generally thought so, and upon that account were not scrupulous of swearing in their ordinary conversation, so long as they swore but truly,) he now commands that we should not swear at all, but avoid all oaths in our conversation. And, in the second place, whereas the letter of the law did only forbid the taking the name of God in vain, but did not forbid the taking the name of the creature, (from whence they concluded that swearing by the creature was not an oath,) our Saviour here teacheth us, that swearing by heaven, or by the earth, or by Jerusalem, or by our heads, (which were the usual forms of swearing among the Jews in their common conversation,) are truly and properly oaths. For all these things, when they are sworn by, have relation and respect to God. Heaven is his throne, and the earth is his footstool, and Jerusalem is his peculiar city, and our heads are entirely at his disposal; and therefore, having this relation to God, the honour of his name is concerned in them; and we ought not to swear by them in our conversation any more than by the name of God.

But what then must we do? how must we behave ourselves in this matter of oaths? Why, he tells you in the next verse, *Let your conversation be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than*

these cometh of evil. As if he had said, This is the rule I would have you constantly to observe in your commerce and dealing with men, and in your whole conversation: when you have occasion to affirm a thing, be constant to affirm it without an oath; when you have occasion to deny a thing, say, it is not so, without an oath. When you have occasion to promise that you will do a thing, or not do it, promise, but do not swear: and when you have promised, be sure you be as good as your word: *Let always your yea be yea, and your nay be nay,* as St. James here expresseth it; that is, let your words and your deeds agree together. Not that we are bound to use those precise words of *yea* and *nay,* and those words only, as the Quakers most foolishly interpret it: but thus; Go no further in your communication, or your common conversation, than merely to affirm a thing, if it be true, to deny a thing, if it be false, and to be true to your words in whatsoever you promise. This is more becoming you than the most solemn swearing in the world; and whatsoever is more than this, either proceeds from some evil principle in your minds, or is suggested to you by that evil one the Devil, who promotes the interest of his kingdom by tempting you thus to abuse your tongue.

Taking now together all this that I have said, it appears, methinks, very plainly, that all swearing is not here forbid by our Saviour, but only needless swearing; swearing when we can avoid it; swearing when we are not called to it; swearing when there is no necessity, nor any great charity to be served by it: in a word, swearing in our common conversation; for it is plainly of such kind of swear-

ing and oaths that our Saviour here treats. That he did not intend to treat here of such oaths as are imposed upon us by authority; whether to the giving testimony to a truth in a business in controversy, or giving security to the public for our performance in any matter: I say, that our Saviour did not here treat of such kinds of oaths is abundantly plain from the oaths he instanceth in; such as swearing by heaven, or earth, or Jerusalem; for these kinds of oaths were never allowed in any court of judicature among the Jews. Whenever an oath was exacted of any one, it was always in the name of the God of heaven.

And then, secondly, this is plainer from the opposition that follows after this his command against swearing: *Swear not*, saith he, *at all, but let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay:* it is our communication, our ordinary, daily converse and commerce with men, from whence our Saviour would have all oaths banished; and instead of which he would only have direct affirmations or denials used. But it by no means follows from hence, that because we may not swear in our communication, where there is no need of it, therefore we may not swear upon extraordinary occasions, when we are called to it for the sake of righteousness, and peace, and truth.

And thus much (if not too much) about this text of our Saviour's. As for the other passage of St. James's, which is now the argument of my Discourse, I need say nothing further about it, considering that what has been already said doth sufficiently give an account of it; for undoubtedly, as I said before, St. James in these words copied after our Saviour, and only repeats his commandment, varying a little (and

but a little) his expressions. And therefore, whatever is the sense of our Saviour's passage, is certainly the sense of his: only the last clause of this text I think it worth while to take notice of to you, because I believe it is not rightly translated: *Above all things*, saith St. James, *my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath;* all that is plain: *but let your yea be yea; and your nay be nay;* that is, as I said before, let your words and your actions be both of a piece. That this is the sense is plain from that expression of St. Paul, in the first of the Second of Corinthians, verse 18. *As God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay:* that is, I did not say one thing and do another. When our *yea is yea*, we are true to our words; but when our words are *yea* and *nay*, we are false to them. This is the scripture language about that matter. And then follows that clause which I said was not rightly translated, *lest ye fall into condemnation*; instead of ὑπὸ κρίσιν, *into condemnation*, the best copies read εἰς ὑποκρίσιν, *into dissimulation, or lying.* So that this is the meaning of the passage; I give it you in the words of one of your best expositors: "This especial caveat "I give you, that you permit not yourselves that "custom of swearing by heaven or earth, or any "other form of oath. Instead of such unnecessary "customs, it will be much more for your turn that "ye take care that your performance be agreeable "to your words, that ye fall not into lying and false-"speaking."

But, secondly, as it cannot be proved from these texts that all swearing is forbidden to Christians; so further it is evident, both from the practice of our

Saviour and St. Paul, that all swearing is not forbidden. It cannot be imagined that our Saviour would in his own actions contradict his own doctrine; that he should swear himself, and yet forbid his disciples the use of swearing. And yet nothing is more certain than that our Saviour did swear in the most solemn manner that could be; for he did answer upon oath to the demands of the high priest, when at his trial, in the twenty-sixth of St. Matthew, the high priest said to him, *I adjure thee, by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ; Jesus answered him, and told him, he was.* Which was as much an answer upon oath, and was so accounted by all that stood by, as if one in our days should answer after he had kissed the gospels, "that "he would swear the truth, the whole truth, and "nothing but the truth." For among the Jews, the constant way of tendering oaths in their public courts was by way of adjuration. The magistrate did adjure them; that is, he commanded them to swear, in the name of the living God, to the truth of such questions as he asked them; and their answers to those questions were always accounted oaths. And for this practice they had the express law of God, as you may see in the fifth of Leviticus, 1st verse, *If a man hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness whether he hath seen or known of such a thing, if he doth not utter it, he shall bear his iniquity.* If he hath heard *the voice of swearing;* that is, if being adjured or required to answer upon oath, concerning what he hath seen or heard, he doth not declare the truth, he is perjured.

And then, as for St. Paul, so far was he from thinking all oaths unlawful, that in several of his

Epistles he voluntarily makes use of them; that is to say, in weighty momentous matters, where the truth of God's word, or the salvation of men's souls was concerned: *God is my witness*, saith he in one place; *As God is true*, in another place; *I call God for a record upon my soul*, in another place; *Before God I lie not*, in another place. What are all these expressions, but solemn forms of swearing? Indeed they are as truly and properly oaths as words can make. And yet, I dare say, there is none of you harbours a thought either that St. Paul was ignorant of the Christian doctrine in this matter; or that, if he had believed the Christian doctrine to have forbid all oaths, he would in any case have practised it himself.

But, thirdly, there are a great many other considerations, from whence the lawfulness of swearing, when we are called to it, may be evinced, and the frivolousness of the Quakers' objections against it may be detected.

I will just touch upon some of them. First of all, so far is swearing from being forbid in the Old Testament, that it is in some cases commanded, and looked upon as a piece of religion. Thus, Deut. xiii. 4. *Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him; and thou shalt swear by his name.* And David tells us, Psalm lxiii. 11. *All they that swear by him shall be commended: but the mouth of those that speak lies shall be stopped.*

Secondly, God himself is represented to us by the apostle, as making use of this practice of swearing for the greater confirmation of his promises. Thus, Heb. vi. 13. *When God made the promise to Abraham, because he could swear by none greater,*

he swore by himself. And being willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, he confirmed his promise by an oath. Thus far St. Paul. Now certainly God would not have done this, had an oath been unlawful in itself.

Thirdly, all mankind hath been always sensible, not only of the conveniency and lawfulness of oaths, but of the necessity of them, both in order to the securing human society, and the ending differences between man and man. And accordingly all mankind hath not only allowed them, but required them. And this is that which St. Paul saith in the forecited place, of the sixth of the Hebrews, *an oath for confirmation is to men an end of all strife.* Now certainly that which is so necessary, both for the peace of the world, and the ending differences among men, cannot be thought an unlawful or wicked thing.

Fourthly and lastly, even of those that have spoke most against swearing, as there have been several, both of Jews and heathens and Christians, in the old time; yet it doth not appear that any of these did condemn or disapprove of all oaths, but only of such as were needless and impertinent. Pythagoras, and all his followers, gave it as a rule, that a man should fear an oath; but their meaning was, not to forbid all oaths, but to caution men that they did not use them rashly, and upon slight occasions.

The Essenes, which were a sect among the Jews, talked as much against oaths as our Quakers; but yet, for all that, every one of them took a solemn oath at his admission into their society.

I told you before, that several of our Christian fathers talk much against swearing upon any occa-

sion; and this the Quakers urge against us as a strong argument that the Christian doctrine about swearing is different now from what it was in those days. But they are much mistaken. These authors, that speak most against swearing, speak against it in no other sense than our Saviour and his apostles do, of which I have given you an account. They never designed to possess their hearers that all oaths were unlawful, but only such as were unnecessary: and their constant practice shews the truth of this. For oaths before a magistrate, whether for giving security to the public, or for rendering their testimony to the truth of a thing, were as much in use then as they are now: and yet we never hear of any Christian that scrupled to take oaths in these cases, provided that in the oaths they took they did not swear by some false deity. On the contrary, we have sufficient evidence in those times that Christians were as ready, when they were called to it, to give their oath as any other people were.

But I have said enough upon this point. I would not indeed have said so much, had it not been for the Quakers, who think they have such a mighty advantage against us as to this point.

But now, having proved that all swearing is not unlawful, it is fit, on the other side, that mighty care should be taken that we do not swear unlawfully. In our conversation we must not swear at all; that is sufficiently taught us by our Saviour: but when we are called upon by law to swear, then we may do it, nay, we must: but then, at that time, it infinitely concerns us to be wonderfully careful both how we swear and what.

An oath is the most sacred thing in the world;

for it is the most solemn appeal to God that we can make. The very notion of an oath is, that a man thereby calls God to witness to the truth of what he saith or promiseth; nay, he doth not only appeal to him as a witness, but as a judge and avenger. Every man that swears an oath, whether it be in the way of promise, or by the way of asserting the truth of a matter of fact, is supposed to speak in these terms: "I call thee, O God, the Lord of heaven and earth, "who knowest the secrets of all hearts, I call thee "to witness, that I uprightly and sincerely speak "the truth in this matter." Or if it be a promissory oath, "I call thee to witness, that I do sincerely mean and purpose to perform that which I "do now promise. Nay, I do not only call upon "thee as a witness of my truth and sincerity in this "matter, but as an avenger of my sin, if I swear "falsely. Those men, for whose satisfaction I take "this oath, do not know my heart; and for that "reason I appeal to thee, who dost know it. Thou "art the Lord of all: and accordingly as I deal truly "or falsely in this matter, do thou deal with me, "both in this world and that which is to come."

This, I say, is the nature and importance of every oath that is taken. O how infinitely then doth it concern all men, whenever they are called to give an oath, to consider extremely well what they are going about, and to act in that matter with the greatest caution, with the greatest reverence, and with the greatest sincerity in the world! How shall a man for ever answer it to his own conscience, nay, how can he ever expect to escape hell and damnation, if he forswears himself; that is, if he either declares that for truth which he knows is not so, or

promiseth that which he doth not intend to perform! Nay, that is not the only perjury: for a man is guilty of that sin even when he is uncertain whether what he swears be true: and likewise when, having promised a thing with an intention to perform it, he fails afterwards in the performance, provided it was in his power to perform it.

I am loath to say that there is too just occasion at this time, and among ourselves, to speak against all these sorts of perjury. But I am afraid it is too true. Perjury, in all these kinds, seems to be too frequently practised in this kingdom; nay, I am afraid it is one of the crying, reigning sins of the nation. But if it be, good God! in what a miserable condition are we, unless it please God to work a reformation among us!

Perjury is one of those sins that, above all others, calls upon God for his judgments upon a nation. Thus God tells us by his prophet Jeremiah, in the twenty-third chapter and the 10th verse, *Because of swearing the land mourneth.* And God himself has put a mark upon it, above all other sins, in the third commandment: *Whosoever taketh the name of the Lord his God in vain,* (that is, as I told you, whoever forswears himself,) *the Lord will not hold that man guiltless.* Such a man shall certainly be punished severely.

And accordingly amongst the heathens it was the general sense, that of all sinners whatsoever the perjured man was the worst: and such a one was particularly to expect the vengeance of God both upon himself and his family.

And there is great reason for all this: for a man, in forswearing himself, doth really defy God, and

renounce all his hopes of mercy from him. For whereas in the case of other sins there may be an appeal made to God's mercy, yet in this case of perjury there is none: for he that is perjured hath precluded himself of this benefit, because he hath braved God Almighty, and hath, in effect, told him to his face, that if he was forsworn he would desire no mercy.

I pray God make us all sensible of the heinousness of this sin, that so, upon all occasions, we may preserve inviolable in our minds the sacredness and religion of an oath; and, whenever we are called upon to swear, may, as the prophet expresseth it, *swear in truth, and righteousness, and judgment.*

And thus much of the first head I proposed to insist on. As for the other part of my argument against profane swearing in our conversation, I shall refer it to the next Lord's day.

Now to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, &c.

A SERMON

PREACHED OCTOBER 12, 1690.

JAMES v. 12.

Above all things, my brethren, swear not.

I HAVE already, in my last Discourse, given you a large account of the meaning of this text, and likewise of that other command of our Saviour, in the fifth of St. Matthew, from whence this is taken; and have shewed, that these prohibitions do not extend to all oaths, but only oaths in our common conversation, or heedless, unnecessary swearing, or taking God's name in vain in our discourse.

This is that I now come to treat about, and which St. James means when he says, *Above all things, my brethren, swear not.*

I am sorry, indeed, there should be any occasion for preaching against such a practice as this: one would think that in a civilized nation, where learning and the arts flourish, and where politeness and good breeding in our conversation is every where pretended to; and especially in a nation where the authority of our Lord Jesus is owned, and his religion is professed, and that too with greater purity than in our neighbouring countries; I say, in such a nation as this, one would think there was no such thing as profane swearing to be heard in communication; but we should, upon all occasions, use the

name of God with the greatest reverence in the world.

But, alas! to our shame, it is quite otherwise. No practice is more common amongst us than swearing and cursing: we outdo the very heathens in our profane usage of the name of God; no order or degree of men is free from it. The gentleman and the mechanic, the person of honour and the beggar, are equally tainted with this vice. The mouths of several of us are so used to oaths that they cannot tell a story, they cannot pass a jest, they cannot transact their business, nay, they can hardly ask a question, or answer one, without an oath or a curse. It is the seasoning of all their discourse; it is to pass for the evidence both of their wit and truth, and sense too. Nay, the very children in the streets are perfect at it. The many of those that are not taught to say their prayers are yet taught to swear and damn roundly in almost every sentence they speak. O God, whither doth all this tend, and what will be the conclusion of these things, if this deluge of profaneness which overflows our land hath not, through the mercy of God, and the care of the government, some stop put to it!

I mean, at this time, most heartily to set myself to shew both the sin, and the danger, and the folly, and the inexcusableness of this vice. I will not pretend to say any thing that is new to you upon this argument: but I only desire that the plain, obvious things which you have perhaps heard over and over again, and which every one may readily suggest to himself upon this occasion, may be seriously weighed and considered by all of us. And if they be so, two things I hope for: first, that some of those at least

that are guilty of this fault, will, upon the consideration of these things, endeavour to break themselves of it; and, secondly, that some others who are not guilty of it, will yet be so sensible of the mischief that it doth in the world, that they will do what they can, as opportunity is offered them, to correct this fault among those they converse with.

And in truth, if those who are free from this sin themselves would but have the charity or the courage (as it fairly comes in their way, and when they may do it without offence or breach of good manners) to discountenance it among those they have dealings with, a good step would be made towards the bringing it out of fashion. For there is so little to be said for this naughty custom, even by those that use it most, that if their friends and acquaintance would take a little pains with them, there might be hopes of their cure.

I hope I may go a great way towards the setting the hearts of all serious and considering men against this vice, by shewing this, that, taking all things together, there is no sin in the whole world that doth afford more arguments against itself, or for the practice of which a man can say less in his own excuse or justification, than this sin of profane swearing. And if the case be thus with it, who but a fool or a madman would ever use himself to it?

Now, for the making out this point, there needs no more but to consider these following things, which are all undeniably plain.

First, That it is a grievous sin in itself.

Secondly, That it is attended with very mischievous consequences.

Thirdly, That it is contrary to all good manners and good breeding.

Fourthly, That it highly disserves and destroys those ends that a man means to serve by it.

Fifthly, That what is pleaded in its justification still makes it more unjustifiable.

And, lastly, That it is a fault that is very easily avoided; which still renders a man the more inexcusable for continuing in it.

Of each of these things in their order.

First of all, it is a very grievous sin in itself. No man can doubt of that, that is in the least instructed in the doctrine of Christianity. There is not any one sin more plainly, more expressly forbid by the law of our Saviour, than that of swearing: *I say unto you*, saith he, *Swear not at all: neither by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by Jerusalem, nor by your heads.* All these forms of oaths which are used in conversation are wholly forbid to Christians; not only those solemn ones where the name of God is sworn by, but even the lesser ones, where God is not named, but only the creatures; all sorts of swearing in conversation is prohibited by our Saviour; nay, his apostle St. James lays such a stress upon this command of our Saviour's, that he says, *Above all things, my brethren, swear not; neither by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath.* Surely that cannot be a slight sin that the apostle is so vehement in his caution against; *Above all things, my brethren, swear not.* Why, he could not have said more against murder, and adultery, and sacrilege, and perjury. Not that I think that every oath a man swears in his common discourse is a sin of so horrid a nature as those I have now mentioned; but

this is that I would remark from hence, that swearing is as directly and expressly forbid to Christians as any of these sins, and consequently must be a great sin: and therefore, for my part, I do wonder how any man can call himself or think himself a Christian that lives in the practice of it. It is a thing so strictly forbid, and withal so much in a man's power to refrain, that I cannot believe a man can have any reverence of his Saviour, or any regard in the world to his authority, that can live in a practice so directly contradictory to his most sacred and express laws. Why, a religious Turk will forbear wholly the use of wine, (though there be more temptations to it than that of swearing,) because his prophet hath forbid it: a devout papist will not eat flesh on a fasting-day, be he never so much tempted to it; though yet that is not a commandment of God, but only an ordinance of their church: but yet we can live in the daily practice of swearing, which is as expressly forbid by our Saviour as any thing in the world, and pretend all the while to be Christians. But it may be said, Are there not many sins that Christians are too often guilty of, which yet, for all that, do not hinder them from being good Christians? I answer, sins of ignorance are indeed consistent with our Christianity; nay, and so also are sins of infirmity: but then I much question whether the practice of swearing can fall under either of these notions. A sin of ignorance it cannot be, because we all know that it is a sin: and as for sins of infirmity, they are chiefly committed in two instances; that is to say, either in the failure of a man's performance, as, for example, when a man doth not his duty so well as he should do in any case, or when he doth

it not so often as he should do; or, secondly, when through inconsideration or surprise he falls into some sin, which, if he had been careful over his own mind, he would have avoided. These, I say, are sins of infirmity: but no man that understands things can take that for a sin of infirmity which is not barely an omission of our duty, but a downright transgression of a known prohibition. No man can take that for a sin of infirmity which is not barely an irregularity or disorderliness of our passions and appetites, but is a sin of the action; of the action, I say, which every man hath at his command, though he hath not the motions or passions of his mind always in his disposal. And, lastly, no man can take that for a sin of infirmity which is not one single action, or an action only now and then, upon extraordinary temptation, committed; but is a habit of action, a custom, a practice, a course that is as frequently repeated as there are temptations to it: no man, I say, can think such a practice as this to be a sin of infirmity, but must acknowledge it to be a course of wilful sin: and if so, then I am sure the custom of swearing in our conversation is as much a wilful sin as any other whatsoever. But how then it can consist with a man's Christianity, that is to say, with the state of grace and regeneration, or the hopes of salvation in another world, let all such as are concerned look to it.

But to go on with the sinfulness of this practice: we may be apt to look upon it as a slight matter, and to be therefore only evil because our Saviour hath forbid it: but really there is a great deal more in the thing. The taking of God's name into our mouths upon every trifling occasion, and especially

swearing by it, is a thing really bad in itself, and which the light of nature doth sufficiently shew to be so; and therefore all men that had any sense of religion, even among the heathens, did very seriously reprove the practice of it, as well as our Saviour. Thus the philosopher in Stobæus; "Some," saith he, "advise men to be careful to swear the "truth; but I advise principally that a man do not "easily swear at all." To the same purpose Epictetus; "Shun oaths, if it be possible." And so likewise Simplicius; "We ought wholly to avoid swear-"ing, except upon occasions of great necessity." And Plato to the same purpose; "The name of God is "not to be made use of upon slight occasions." And Hierocles tells us, "That the true way to preserve "the reverence that is due to it is to abstain from "swearing." There is an infinite reverence and veneration due to the name of God, which all those that use it slightly or commonly do violate. Here then is the sinfulness of swearing in our discourse, that it is an affront to God, a violation of that honour and respect we owe to him, an impudent abuse and prostitution of his sacred name, against all the reason and religion in the world: in a word, the sinfulness of common swearing and cursing lies in this, that it is blasphemy; which certainly all men that have any sense of God must needs apprehend to be a dreadful sin.

It is likely, many of those that are used to swear and curse have other notions of this matter, and do not dream that they are guilty of blasphemy while they are calling to God to witness at every sentence they speak; while they are swearing by his name, by his life, by his wounds, by his blood; or while

they are, in his name, cursing, or damning, or confounding themselves or others. But this is truly the blaspheming of God, whether they think so or no: for I know no other notion of blasphemy, than that it is an unworthy, injurious, and contumelious treating of God in our words and discourse.

Now, if oaths and curses in our common discourse be not of this nature, I know not what is. What can be an indignity put upon God, or a profanation of his sacred name, if these be not? Every one must needs think so, that considers that the practice of these things is a direct exposing his tremendous name to contempt; it is a making it vile and cheap and despicable; it is a prostituting it, to serve the ends of our silliest humours, our most foolish passions, and our most diabolical furies and transports: nay, more than all this, it is a most impudent appeal to God to witness every foolish, trifling, or wicked word that we speak; and if there be any imprecation added to it, (as there is in all the *Damn me's* and *Confound me's* that are used among us,) it is a downright braving and hectoring God Almighty, and challenging him to do the worst he can to us.

O poor creatures! if God should vindicate his own honour while we are thus defying him, and should strike us dead for these execrable profanations of his holy name, none could blame his justice. But in what a miserable condition should we then be! O the prodigious degeneracy of mankind! O the wonderful patience and clemency of the Maker of them! that they should continually thus dare God Almighty to make them examples of his vengeance; and that he should, instead of taking them at their word,

continue still to pour out his mercies upon them, and thereby to engage them, if it be possible, to repent!

I would to God that all of us, that have unhappily got this custom of cursing or swearing, or are apt to take the name of God idly or vainly into our mouths, would consider seriously what we are doing when we do so. Is it for us, who at the best are but dust and ashes, but as we have made ourselves by our sins are an hundred times worse; is it for us, to take the name of God into our mouths upon every little occasion, and to sport ourselves with it? for us, who are grievous sinners, and obnoxious upon a thousand accounts to the Divine vengeance, even for the most innocent part of our lives; for us, who are altogether precarious beings, and cannot subsist one moment without the continuance of that providence that brought us hither, and the repetition every hour of ten thousand mercies more than we take notice of; I say, is it for us to make light of the name of that God that made us, and doth every minute thus infinitely oblige us? Can we use that name irreverently? Can we, for the gratifying a silly humour, or for the want of something else to say, or for the recommending ourselves to a set of fools and brutes that we converse with, toss that name in our mouths without fear or without wit? that dreadful name which all mankind that hath sense do fear and reverence? that name, which we ourselves, if we have any religion, do invoke in our prayers, and think we can never sufficiently express our veneration of it? that name which, when we do pray, we pray that it may be hallowed and sanctified, and preserved from abuse and profanation? that name which is privy to all

our blasphemies; and, for any thing we know, may confound us the next moment for our profanation of it? that name, which shall one day be exalted over all the world, when God shall come to judge mankind, and call all the impious affronters of it to a severe account for their blasphemies? that name, which the devils themselves (as hardened as they are) do fear and tremble at? and, lastly, that name, which all the holy angels of God in heaven do continually adore, and yet they do not adore it without covering their faces? (so imperfect, so nothing are the highest of created beings in comparison of the name, the majesty of him that created them;) I say, all these things considered, can any one, that hath the least grain of sense, think that this is a name to be taken into our mouths lightly, or rashly, or unadvisedly? Can any one without horror think of putting it to common uses, to tell a story with, or to answer a question with, or to express a passion with, or to make an implement of it in our drunken humours to fill up our discourse when we are at a loss for other words; and, most of all, to call upon this dreadful name (either in sport or passion) to damn us, or those we speak to? Blessed God, for thy infinite mercies in Christ Jesus, forgive all of us, that have ever thus abused and profaned thy holy name, and let thy unspeakable patience and forbearance, which thou hast expressed towards us, in not executing speedily thy vengeance upon our blasphemies and profanations, as they justly deserved, lead us, at length, to such a sense of the honour of thy name, and the veneration that is due to it, that we may never more take it into our mouths but with that reverence and godly fear that becomes the creatures

of Almighty God, and the disciples of our Lord Jesus. Amen, O God, for Jesus Christ's sake!

But thus much of our first particular; the sinfulness of profane swearing. The second thing I have to represent about it (which is all that I shall trouble you with at this time) is this; that as it is a grievous sin in itself, so it is also attended with very mischievous consequences, and that both with respect to the public and ourselves.

First of all, to the public this sin is of very evil consequence in this respect, in that it tends to abate and take off that dread and reverence that men ought to have for oaths, and by that means weakens and loosens the bands of human society. All mankind have, in all ages, been aware that there is no true hank to be had upon men, but by binding their consciences; and that is no otherwise to be done but by concerning God Almighty in the matter, and ordering all those, of whom any security for their faith and truth in any matter was demanded, to make their solemn appeal to God, as a witness, and as a judge, that what they said was true, and what they promised they would perform. This is that we call an oath; and, accordingly, those oaths have been from the beginning of society used among men as the best and the only effectual means, both to oblige men to do their duty in the particular places and offices they were trusted with in the public, and to oblige them likewise to speak the truth in any doubtful, controverted matter, when they were called to give their testimony. This, I say, hath always been the practice of mankind in all ages, and continues so to be at this day. And, suitable to this, Cicero tells us of the Romans, that they had *nullum vin-*

culum ad astringendam fidem jurejurando arctius; "They had no tie so effectual for the securing a "man's faith as his oath." And St. Paul, a greater man than Cicero, hath told us, that *among men, an oath for confirmation is the end of all strife.* Since therefore so much depends upon an oath; since the public is so much concerned in it; since the administration of justice is so much influenced by it; it will readily be acknowledged, that it is one of the greatest concernments of human society, that all men should be obliged to swear truly; and nothing can be of greater mischief to the public than that men should be careless of their oaths, and swear hand over head, as their humours, or their passions, or their interest prompts them; all the world will acknowledge this. And we of this nation have as much reason to be sensible of it as perhaps any people in the world. Now, admitting this to be true, I appeal to every man, whether any thing can be more pernicious to human government and society than such a practice; which, if it be admitted, doth naturally take off from men all that religion and veneration they have for an oath, and makes it, in a manner, an indifferent matter whether they swear truly or falsely. Yet such a practice (and no better) is that I am now speaking of, the practice of oaths in our common conversation. If the Devil himself was to study and contrive a way for the disarming mankind of that natural reverence and veneration they have for oaths, and bringing them, without much scruple of conscience, to swear any thing at any time, whether true or false, as their own interests, or the importunity of others, did tempt them to it; he could not, in the world, pitch upon a

more effectual one than this; to make oaths familiar to them upon all occasions, to bring them into customary use in ordinary conversation. That man that can swear a hundred times a day, when there is no reason for it, I cannot imagine what regard he can have for an oath, when he is called upon to give it, when there is reason. When a man is come to that pass, that he hath used himself to call God to witness for every thing that he saith; nay, and to call upon him almost every hour to damn him, and confound him, pray what is there to hinder such a man, or what reason is there to believe that he will not call God to witness with the same freedom and unconcernedness, when he is called to it in a court of justice? Would you make a man's conscience different, according to the different places he is in, so that he may make a conscience of swearing in one place, but yet shall make no conscience of swearing in all other places whatsoever? I must confess, I am as willing to believe well of mankind as is possible; and therefore I dare not say but there may be such men found in the world, that in spite of the natural consequences of things, may be so honest, that though they do not fear an oath in their discourse, yet would fear one before a magistrate. But this I say, and I am sure of it, that nothing in the earth doth more tend to make men heedless and regardless of their most solemn oaths than to inure themselves to the practice of oaths in their common discourse. And I am very much afraid, that to this practice, which hath so much obtained among us, we do, in a great measure, owe those many false oaths that have deprived men both of their lives and their estates, that we, at this day, do not without reason complain of. And, therefore,

certainly it concerns the public, if they would have the reverence of oaths kept up, if they would not have faith and truth lost from among mankind, to suppress, as much as is possible, this vile, detestable custom of swearing and cursing in our conversation.

But secondly, to conclude; this custom of swearing is not only of very mischievous consequence to the public, but to ourselves also. When I say this, I do not mean the mischief that it doth to a man's credit and reputation, by giving occasion to all the world to believe that the man that useth it is a man of no conscience, that he hath no religion nor no truth, which yet is the constant fate of those that are much given to swearing: I say, though this be a very mischievous consequence of swearing, and a necessary one too, and ought to be seriously considered by all those that give themselves up to this practice; yet I do not here insist on it: it will fall more naturally under another head. But that which I intend is this; that there is this evil consequence doth always attend the custom of swearing, that it engages a man in a world of perjuries which he beforehand is not aware of, or, if he was, he would tremble at the thoughts of them. It is an old observation, "He that sweareth continually," (they are St. Chrysostom's words,) "both wilfully and unwil-"fully, both ignorantly and knowingly, both in "earnest and in jest; such a man, being often "transported by anger, and many other things, will "frequently forswear himself." It is almost unavoidable, but a man that is much given to swear in his discourse (a man that useth to bind every thing he says, or every thing that he promiseth, with an

oath) must say a great many things that are not true, and must likewise promise a great many things which he never performeth. In a multitude of oaths there cannot want perjury, (as a wise man said.)

God help us! As the condition of human affairs is in this world, there is no man, that considers well, that dare be accountable for the exact truth of every thing that he hath occasion to say in conversation, be he never so careful of what he saith. And if so, in what a condition are those open sluices among us, that vent every thing that comes into their heads, and serves to fill up talk, whether it be news, or stories of other persons, or fancies of their own, and clinch all they say with bitter oaths and imprecations?

I dare say you are all sensible that those who make a practice of swearing in their talk, make no great distinction about this matter, and the occasion upon which they use their oaths. But they come from them in course, without thinking, without deliberating, upon all occasions.

How then is it possible that in such a multitude of idle discourse as slips from them, they should not many times a day overshoot themselves either in affirming more than is true, or in promising more than they make good? and yet, by their calling God to witness to the truth of such things, they become really and strictly perjured and forsworn; if, indeed, it be perjury to swear that which is false, or that we are not certain is true; or if it be perjury to say a thing that we do not mean to do.

I would to God all that have accustomed themselves to take the name of God into their mouths

upon slight occasions would seriously consider this; and withal, consider what a sort of crime perjury is: what a horrid defiance it is of God Almighty, and what a solemn address made to him to destroy us and confound us, if he either have power or justice.

But I have said enough upon this head: as for the four following which remain, I have not time to treat of them as they deserve, and therefore I shall reserve them to the next opportunity.

I pray God give us all such a lively sense of the excellence and holiness of his nature, such a sense of his greatness, his majesty, and power, and wisdom, and justice, and goodness, that we may, in all our thoughts and words and actions, give him that honour and reverence and adoration, that is for ever due to his most holy name.

To this God immortal and invisible be all glory, &c.

A SERMON

PREACHED OCTOBER 26, 1690.

JAMES v. 12.

Above all things, my brethren, swear not.

YOU may remember the argument I am engaged in, and consequently may know beforehand what sort of discourse you are to expect at this time; that is to say, a hearty dissuasive from that practice which is too much in use among all sorts of persons, and may justly be accounted one of the reigning sins of the nation; I mean the practice of swearing and cursing in our discourse.

I believe I said enough in my last Discourse to convince any serious man, both of the great sinfulness of this practice, and of the evil consequences that do attend it; which were the two heads I then proceeded upon.

I now come to lay before you some other considerations, which, if they be added to what I have before represented upon this point, cannot but weigh so far with all men that ever reflect upon their own actions, as to set them perfectly against this practice; since it will appear to be, upon all accounts whatsoever, so infinitely unreasonable and inexcusable. I am sensible those who are not used to this practice will think that I have already said enough against it; but I desire them to remember that I

do not preach to those that are innocent, but to those that are guilty of this fault; and for the rescuing of such from so detestable a custom, all that can be said is little enough.

I desire, therefore, in the third place, those that are apt to swear or curse in their common discourse, would be pleased to consider, not only that it is a grievous sin, and brings many evil consequences upon mankind, as I shewed the last time, but also that it is contrary to all good manners and good breeding. This will perhaps be very surprising to a great many: for it is probable several of the better sort among us, that are given to this vice, did for this reason take up the custom; because they thought it the best breeding, since the gentlemen and the persons of quality they saw did so much use it; and from whom but from them should they take their measures in these matters? and as for the better sort, that have really had a liberal education, sure they should know good breeding better than that sort of men, whose bread it is to be precise and formal, and to teach others to be so.

Why, be it so. But then, I pray, be pleased to consider what is that which we call good manners, or good breeding. If there be any fixed notion of it amongst mankind, it must be this; to have an easy, inoffensive, obliging way of address and behaviour, to be more courteous and civil upon all occasions in conversation, than the rustic, untutored part of mankind can be supposed to be. This, I say, must certainly be the notion of good breeding and good manners; because the contrary to it is always accounted ill breeding and ill manners; that is to say, all sorts of scurrilous, rude, unbecoming treatment

of any one. When we say that any man shews ill breeding, or doth an ungenteel thing, we mean no more than this, that he doth not behave himself with that civility or decency towards others in that matter, that a well-bred man ought to do.

I pray now apply this notion of good breeding to the thing we have before us. I hope, as mad as the world is, there is a very great number of men that have a hearty sense of God and religion upon their minds, and would be ready to shew it upon all occasions, even with the loss of all that they have. The honour of God is as dear to them as their own: and so great a respect they have to his laws, that it is a real trouble to them to see any affront or violation done to them in their presence. Why, now, must it not be wonderfully grievous and uneasy to all this kind of men, to hear at any time the name of God blasphemed? to see the most sacred laws of our Saviour despised and trampled upon, to have oaths and curses sounding in their ears upon all occasions, and without any provocation? Certainly it must be thus: a man, that is truly religious, can no more avoid the being concerned and wounded and filled with deep resentments when God's holy name is abused and profaned, than he can avoid it when he hears himself traduced, and his parents and family unjustly railed upon. Nay, and even those that are not sincerely religious, but only would be thought to be so, even these, though, I say, they are not inwardly concerned at these practices, yet they must appear as if they were so, whenever they hear the name of God profaned: otherwise they do not maintain the person and character they design to go under.

These things now being so, where is the good manners or the good breeding of swearing in conversation, provided there be but any one in the company that has either any sense of religion, or but pretends to have any? Why, it is so far from that, that every oath, every curse, every thing that is vented in contempt of God or of religion is really an affront and indignity put upon those you converse with; and you use them every whit as barbarously when you treat them in this manner, as if you should spit in their faces at every time you would answer a question; or give them the lie at every thing they would affirm. I grant indeed that swearing and cursing is no ill-breeding among those that have banished all sense of God and religion from their minds; because there is, in that case, no affront, no rudeness offered to those you converse with, but only to God Almighty, who, in that company, is not supposed to be present.

I pray then let it be used only in such company; for if there be but one sober, virtuous man present, he is as ungenteelly dealt with, as if you had offered him a downright affront. Either therefore men must forbear swearing, except where they are secure of their company, or they must quit all their pretences to civility and good manners.

But, fourthly, I desire it may be further considered, that this practice of profane swearing in our discourse doth not really serve any of those ends which it is made use of for: nay, in truth, it doth really disserve them; and therefore, certainly, all men that are not mad, but would so act as to be able to give a reason for what they do, must needs conclude this practice one of the most unreasonable in

the world, because it is destructive of those very ends it pretends to serve.

I grant indeed some sorts of swearing may now and then happen to do a good turn to them that use it; as for instance, a false oath in a court of justice may now and then gain a cause; or, if it do not, the witness, we suppose, is well paid for his perjury; though of all men in the world, woe be to those that serve their ends by these means; for, if there be a just God in heaven, the portion of such men (both the swearers and the suborners) will be, of all others, the most wretched and intolerable. It often proves so in this world, but it will certainly prove so hereafter.

But now, to come to our point, as for this customary swearing and cursing in our discourse, I do not know any end it serves to, unless to honest people, to teach them to distinguish between good and bad company, and to give them a mark by which they may know what conversation they are to avoid. I can but think of three ends that people can propose to themselves in the use of it; that is, either to gain more credit to what they say, or to give reputation to their wit, or to express their courage.

But now, in fact, it is found that common swearing and cursing is so far from promoting any of these ends, that it is the most effectual way to disappoint them all. I will touch a little upon each of them.

In the first place, some may have a fancy that they shall be better believed in what they affirm or promise, if they bind it with an oath, or if they damn themselves if it be not true that they say. But sure

these men must be little acquainted with the world, that take up such a notion. Mankind are a great deal better at this time of day than to be caught with such flourishes. There are few that deal in the world, but will much sooner believe a man that doth not use to swear, upon his bare word, than he will believe a common swearer upon his oath. Nay, the very using of oaths, where there is no need of them, gives a very just suspicion to any man that there is no sincerity at the bottom. And indeed of all men living, as the world goes, those that swear most and damn themselves most are the least believed in any thing they say or promise: and there is great reason for this. For why should a man go beyond the common rules of conversation, unless he meant to serve some private turns by it? And how can that man be supposed to make conscience of speaking truly in any slight matter he affirmeth or promiseth, that makes no conscience of affronting and blaspheming the name of God; in our religious veneration of which all our obligation to speak truth is founded?

But, secondly, others perhaps may look upon the use of oaths as an expression of their wit and good parts. This is indeed a very low notion of wit; but yet some, I do believe, have taken it up. They cannot but think that oaths are a grace to their discourse and a seasoning to their conversation. They fancy that a repartee is not so brisk, or a story not so well told, or a man's sense about any thing so solemnly delivered, unless it be larded at every turn with the name of God, or a curse upon themselves. Indeed, from such people nothing (as they think) comes gracefully, unless it be embellished with the

ornament of some silly word they have taken up, either a round oath, or a curse, or the corruption of one, or something that is near akin to it. But these men are really to be pitied, if they think such kind of phrases to be any ornaments to their discourse; for all men that have wit are sensible sufficiently, that none but those that want it would endeavour to supply its place by such kind of gibberish; I call it gibberish, for it really is so. A man that swears and curses to add grace to his discourse, might as well serve his purpose by repeating a word or two out of *Propria quæ Maribus*, or saying any scrap of pedlars French; which whether it would be an argument of wit in any one, I leave to all to judge.

Wit and profaneness are infinitely different things; as likewise is wit and impertinency. There is indeed no sort of kindred between these things. I do not deny but that some men, who are profane enough, may have wit: but this I am sure of, no man is therefore witty, because he is either profane or impertinent. Nor was there ever any man accounted a wit that had nothing to shew for it but oaths or curses, or a set of insignificant words that made nothing to his purpose. Nay, so far from that, that those who most practise this way of conversation are most justly to be suspected to have the least share of that which they would be thought to have.

But, thirdly, though men do not much increase the reputation of their wit by swearing, yet it may be said they shew courage and bravery thereby. Perhaps there are some that think so. Nor would they swear or curse so often, but that they fancy that they do hereby strike a terror into those that

hear them, and make them believe they have no ordinary mean persons to deal with. Alas, poor men! in this too they are deceived; for every body knows that these hectors and bravos are the furthest from true valour and courage of all in the world. They may indeed by this trick fright children and silly people, as it is likely they do; and they would fright them as much or more likewise, if they put on a vizor painted with a devil's face. But all mankind, that can distinguish between things, are sensible that hectoring and swaggering is the worst argument of courage; nay, on the contrary, the most certain argument of no courage that can be. True valour and fortitude is no flash of passion, but a sedate composed temper of mind grounded upon good reason, and therefore it is always cool and even and temperate upon all occasions. But blustering of conversation, and making use of a set of frightful words, to amuse some and fright others, is only a sign that a man pretends to courage and boldness, but hath it not. This, I do believe, is the sense of mankind in these matters. And therefore I do heartily wish that all those that are apt, for the shewing their magnanimity, as they may think it, or for the expressing their resentments of any thing, to break out into oaths and damning themselves or others; I say, I wish they would consider how much they deserve the reputation they would get by these practices, and how poor and sneaking and cowardly they represent themselves hereby to all considering men.

But this is a small thing. It concerns them infinitely more to consider who that God is that they are a braving and hectoring, that they may thus shew their courage. Is it an equal match between

God Almighty and them; they, to shew themselves bold, will affront him; to make themselves feared by little people, will shew themselves fearless of him? But what do they think of God all this time? do they believe that he lives, and that he sees this impudence of theirs, and do they not tremble? If God be holy and just, he will not suffer himself to be always thus affronted by rude men, without calling them to account for it. If God be almighty, he hath thunderbolts to revenge the blasphemy of bold, atheistical men: and it is out of his infinite mercy that he doth not strike all blasphemers dead with them. But he spares us, and we hope he will spare us, that, if it be possible, we may be brought to repentance. But let us not play the fool for ever, in hopes of impunity: for a time will come when we shall, as certainly as we are here present, be called to an account, and a terrible one, for all the injuries and abuses and profanations we have done to God and his religion, unless it be our happiness to prevent it by a timely repentance.

But, fifthly, to leave this, there is this further thing to be said against this practice of swearing, which will still render it more inexcusable; as it serves no end, so neither doth it admit of any apology to be made for it; so far from that, that even what is pleaded in its justification doth still make it more unjustifiable.

I know but two things that any one that is addicted to this custom can urge in his own excuse; and you shall hardly talk with a sensible man but he will readily pitch upon one of these things as an apology for it; that is to say, he is either provoked to it by being put into a passion, or he doth

it when he is heated to it with wine and strong drink.

But I beg of all those, that make use of these pretences, to consider how very ridiculous they are. You would not swear nor curse, but that you are put into a passion, or that sometimes you have no government of yourselves, having drunk to excess. But can either of these things apologize for your abusing and affronting the name of God, and transgressing his most express laws? if they can, why then the most horrid blasphemies, adulteries, rapes, and murders may be apologized for upon the same account: for most of these villainies are the effect of passion, and many of them of drunkenness too.

Would you admit it as a just excuse in your servant, when he hath told a gross lie to you, to say that he was under the passion of fear when he thus abused you? or would you count it justifiable in him to go and speak all the ill things he could of you in the neighbourhood, and to have no other pretence for it, but that you had some way or other provoked and stirred up his passion of anger? If the same servant, when he came drunk home, should beat or wound you, would you put it up, and say, Alas! he was not himself when he did it; he had drunk too much, otherwise he would not have used me thus?

I dare say every man, when it comes to his own case, hath other notions of this matter, and will not easily think that the committing one fault will be an excuse for another that follows after it. A murder is not less sinful because a man was in passion or in drink when he committed it; he ought rather the more to be sorry for it, because he hath two crimes to answer for. And if it be thus with

swearing, as most certainly it is, the best apology that is made for it is but a wretched one: for it owns that he, that swears the most justifiably hath always a double sin to ask God Almighty pardon for, that of his swearing and cursing, and that passion or drunken humour that led him into it.

But then, after all, as bad as this apology for swearing is, yet it is much to be questioned whether it be true. I doubt much whether any swearer can justly impute his oaths or curses purely to transports of passion or wine; there is this strong reason why he ought not; there are a multitude of persons in the world that are as subject to passions as other men, and may now and then be overtaken with drink. But yet, in their greatest excesses, both of the one sort or the other, never find any temptation in themselves to curse and swear in their discourse; be they never so angry, yet, their mouths not being accustomed to oaths, they know not how to vent their passions in that way; and in their cups, though they cannot perhaps avoid nonsense and impertinency in their discourse, yet oaths and curses they can avoid. This is a plain argument that, whatever men pretend, it is not their passion, or their infirmities of any other sort, that betrays them to this evil practice of cursing and swearing, but only a wretched custom which they have unaccountably contracted. It is a practice they first took up heedlessly, and in imitation of others; and afterwards, growing upon them by use, it is at last become in a manner natural to them. So that this custom of swearing is such an unaccountable sin, that a man hath not so much as his lust, his passion, and infirm-

ities (by which he is wont to excuse all his other crimes) to plead for it.

And this leads me to the sixth and last particular I have to add upon this argument, and that is this; that this sin of swearing is still the more criminal, and the more inexcusable in all of us, in that it is so easily avoided. You have seen there are no ends to be served by it; nay, on the contrary, it is destructive of those ends that men pretend to in the using of it. You have seen there is no apology to be made for it, because these things that are most to be pleaded in its excuse, rather make it worse than better. Nay, you have seen that even our passions and vices do not much tempt us to it. What then can be the temptation to this sin, or where doth it lie? Is there any pleasure in it? I dare say no man will say there is. There can be no more pleasure in using the name of God profanely, than in using any other word or name; unless it be a pleasure to affront God, by thus using his name out of pure hatred to him, which is the utmost pitch of wickedness that the worst of devils can arrive to. Is there any profit or advantage to be got by it? Sure there is none, unless a man had money given him for every oath. But I believe that is not done but upon solemn occasions, where there is a deep malice to be served, or an estate to be got, or to be secured by a false oath. What then? Is there any reputation to be purchased by it? Why, a man would venture a great deal for that; but yet, in this case, the thing we are speaking of is so far from procuring a reputation, or good name among men, that it is the certain way to ruin it. What then is the temptation to swearing and cursing? none in the world. Why

then do men use it? For no reason in the world. What then are we to attribute it to? To an unaccountable custom. Men, by accustoming themselves to such a sort of company, have, in time, and by degrees, learnt a set of words and phrases, which they cannot without some violence forbear to make use of upon all occasions, and especially when they are disordered by drink or passion; and if they had been thus taught by their company to bark like a dog, or to bray like an ass, there is no doubt but they would have done it as naturally upon the same occasions. And this, as far as I can judge, is the true account of this unaccountable sin. I speak as to those that use it most innocently.

And now, if this be the case, how easy is it for any man, that hath never so much used himself to it, to forsake it.

That which makes it so hard a matter for most men to forsake some of their sins is, that those sins are planted in the very make or constitution of their natures. They are strongly inclined to them in their tempers, or they have continual temptations to them in the course of their lives, or they cannot part from them, but they must part from that which is extremely either pleasant or profitable or reputable, or some way or other conducing to their ease and conveniency. But now, though all or most of these things may be pleaded on the behalf of men's other lusts and vices, yet none of them can be urged in favour of this sin we are speaking of; therefore what should hinder but that every man, with a little consideration, and a few trials, should as easily leave it off as he first took it up; or, if he do not, what can be said in his excuse?

To conclude this whole matter.

Having thus, as plainly as I can, represented to you a few of those many things that are to be urged by way of argument against this vice, I desire to add a word or two more by way of advice, or exhortation, and then I have done.

In the first place, I earnestly desire that all those persons that are under the power of this sin would seriously consider of these things; and if, upon that consideration, they are convinced that it is really their duty and their interest to leave this silly as well as impious practice, they would sincerely and heartily endeavour so to do. Now, in order to the breaking themselves wholly of this wicked custom, there are but a few things needful to be done. The main thing of all is, a peremptory resolution to forsake it. The next thing to that is, to keep a constant guard and watch upon their words, that they be not unawares surprised into oaths and curses. It is heedlessness that makes this sin so very rife. If a man would but carefully watch over his words for some few weeks; nay, I may say, for some few days, he would not find it very difficult to break himself of this custom. It was nothing but practice that introduced it, and a little disuse of that practice will as certainly destroy it.

But if a man should find it hard to contest against an inveterate custom, let him call in other assistances which are ready at hand: let him beg of his friends to be his monitors, as to that matter, upon all occasions: let him bind himself voluntarily to undergo such mulcts and penalties and forfeitures as he thinks reasonable for every oath or curse he pronounceth: but, above all, let him avoid all such

company and all such occasions as he finds are most apt to betray him into these extravagancies. In truth, I think the most profligate swearer, if he was once in good earnest resolved to quit this practice, might with a very little of this care and attention, easily effect his purpose.

In the second place, I seriously recommend it to all persons that have any concern for religion or good manners, that they would, as they have opportunity, give their helping hand towards the reclaiming of such of their friends and acquaintance as labour under this infirmity, if indeed I may call it by that name. We are really too tender generally to the company we converse with as to this point. I do not desire any man to be rude, or to break the respect that is due to the conversation he is in, upon this account; but there are so many ways of inoffensively reproving, at least of shewing our disgust of this practice, without any breach of civility, that indeed it can be imputed to nothing but an unconcernedness for the honour of God and religion that we do so tamely and patiently hear his name so often blasphemed without the least expression of our resentment at it.

We might do a world of good to mankind, as well as express a mighty charity to our friends, if we would make it our business to discourage and put out of countenance, as it came in our way, all those rude affronts that are daily and hourly put upon God and religion in conversation: and certainly it discovers a great deal of cowardice and pusillanimity in us that we do it not. The atheists and the profane are bold enough, even to impudence, in affronting God and religion; and we, who know we have a

thousand times a better cause, are mealy-mouthed, and dare not open our lips in the vindication of that God and that cause, which yet we do pretend is dearer to us than all things in the world.

But, thirdly and lastly, it were to be wished likewise that the magistrates and the government would take a little care in this matter. It is a shameful thing, and a reproach to our nation, that those lewd practices of swearing and cursing and damning, almost at every word, should be thus universally practised among us; nay, even that a man cannot pass the streets but he hears it ringing in his ears; and this without any notice taken of it, without the least mark of disgrace or infamy put upon it. I do not say but that we want some severer laws and punishments for the effectual suppressing of these vices; but yet even these laws we have, were they but carefully executed, would put a great stop to the inundation of this kind of wickedness that now overflows us; at least it would let people see that these practices are really faults and crimes, which now they hear nothing of, unless perhaps now and then it be told from the pulpit.

O may God Almighty at last put it into the hearts of all those that have any authority in this kingdom sincerely to endeavour the suppressing of all atheism, and blasphemy, and irreligion, and the profanation of the name of God, that is now too rife among us; and may every one of us, in our places and stations, contribute all we can to so good a work! By this means, and by this only, may we expect to see happy days. Then, when righteousness, and truth, and peace, and true devotion take place, and an universal reformation is made of our wicked and cor-

rupt conversations; then, and not till then, are we capable objects of God's favour; then, and not till then, are we a people prepared and qualified for the Lord to dwell among us.

O may God of his infinite mercy produce these blessed effects among us, for the glory of his name, and the universal happiness of this nation, and of every soul in it!

Which God of his infinite mercy grant, for the sake of his dear Son, &c.

SERMON I.

ON

1 PETER II. 21.

—— *leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.*

THE whole verse runs thus: *For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, &c.*

St. Peter here is exhorting servants to be subject to their masters, and with patience and submission to bear whatever hard usage they might meet with from them: and the argument wherewith he enforceth this exhortation is the example of Christ. He patiently for our sakes underwent a great load of sufferings, and therefore highly reasonable it is that we should not repine at any hard measures we meet with in the world. The force and strength of this argument lies in that which St. Peter addeth in the last part of this verse; namely, that Christ's life was framed for our example; that it was designed to be a pattern for Christians to walk by; and that we are all of us bound to follow his steps. He *left us an example, &c.*

This point of the example of Christ is that I have now designed to treat of; and in speaking to it I shall not restrain it to one instance, that of his sufferings, (nor indeed do St. Peter's words so restrain it, though it must be granted he brings it in upon that occasion,) but I shall consider it in its full latitude with respect to his whole life and conversation in the world.

And in treating of this argument, I shall endeavour these three things:

I. First of all in general, To shew the great obligation that lies upon all Christians to follow Christ's example.

II. Secondly, To explain the extent of this obligation; how far, and in what instances, Christ's life is an example to us, and doth oblige us to imitation.

III. Thirdly, To propose some of those virtues that our Saviour was most eminent for, and which are of the greatest use in human life, and seriously to recommend them to your imitation.

I begin with the first thing, the obligation that lies upon Christians to follow Christ's example. And this shall be my argument at this time.

And I think it the more needful to be insisted on in regard of a notion that some people are too forward to entertain, which asserts, that the life of Christ was not designed for an example to us, but for a means to procure God's acceptance of us. They explain their mind thus: No man can be accepted by God, and entitled to his favour, unless he be perfectly righteous in the eye of God. Now to make a man so, he must either have a perfect inherent righteousness of his own, or the perfect righteousness of another must be imputed to him, as to all intents and purposes to be made his own, and to be looked upon as such. The former sort of righteousness no man can pretend to; nor is he obliged to have it under the second covenant. The latter sort of righteousness therefore is that we must rely upon, and by which we are to expect to be justified. Now this is no other than the righteousness of Jesus Christ, who only was perfectly righteous: this right-

eousness of his being made ours, being imputed to us, is that that must make us perfectly righteous in the sight of God. As therefore the end of Christ's death was to satisfy for the breach of God's laws in our stead, we having all sinned, and so deserved God's wrath; so the end of his life was actually to fulfil the law in our stead, that we might be accounted righteous before God, as if we had fulfilled it ourselves. As his passive obedience, his death and sufferings, were designed for this end to be imputed to all believers, for the excusing them from the punishment due to their sins; so his active obedience, the righteousness of his life, was designed for this end to be imputed to all believers to make them appear righteous before God, though they were not righteous in their own persons. Now the instrument, say they, whereby this righteousness, this obedience of Christ, both active and passive, is made ours, the hand that conveys it to us, is no other than a lively faith; that is, in their sense, a believing in Jesus Christ, a disclaiming all our own righteousness, and confidently applying his righteousness to ourselves. And whoever doth this, is, in God's account, a righteous man without more ado, having all Christ's righteousness so imputed to him as to be made his own.

This is a scheme of Christian religion that some men have laid down to themselves; and if it be a true one, then what becomes of the exemplarity of Christ's life? what becomes of our obligations to walk as he walked? Why verily it all falls to the ground. For since (according to this hypothesis) the very design of Christ's life was to fulfil all righteousness, and all that righteousness of his is made

ours by faith; what need can there be of our fulfilling the same righteousness over again, by endeavouring to copy out Christ's example in our lives? I own that a great many good men may have been bred up in the use of such expressions as these that I have now been mentioning, but yet abhor the consequences that I would draw from them: for all that they mean by Christ's righteousness being imputed to us, and made ours, is no more than this, that we are justified and accepted by God purely and solely for the merits of Jesus Christ, and that not for any righteousness of our own. But they own, nevertheless, that we are all bound, nay even under pain of damnation, to endeavour as much as we can to be virtuous in our persons, and to imitate our blessed Lord in all the instances of virtue and holiness that he hath set before us. Now, if this be all their meaning, God forbid that any man should open his mouth against it; for it is undoubtedly the scripture doctrine, though the words whereby they express their meaning are very improper and unscriptural. But I would never dispute with any one about words, where we agree in the sense. That which I oppose, and which all men that have any regard to the honour of the gospel and the interest of souls, must be concerned to oppose, is the antinomian principle, that is to say, that the righteousness of Christ's life is so imputed to believers, as to serve instead of their own righteousness; that Christ's perfect obedience to the moral law hath discharged us from all obligation to the observance of it. So that provided we do apply this his obedience, this his righteousness to ourselves by faith, there is no need of our being righteous as he was righteous, and framing

our lives after his holy example. This, I say, is both an absurd and a pernicious doctrine, and not to be endured among Christians.

If I should set myself to shew you this at large, and expose this doctrine in all the parts and consequences of it, and to shew how contradictory it is to the account which the scripture gives of this matter, I should spend more of my time and of your patience than I am now willing to do: and therefore I will only remark two things concerning it, and which are very obvious.

First, it supposes Christ not to have performed that which he came into the world to do. Secondly, it supposeth that he came into the world with a very ill design.

First, I say, this doctrine disparageth Christ's undertaking, and supposeth him not to have done that which he came into the world to do. For did not our blessed Saviour come into the world for this end, that he might redeem us from all evil and misery, and put us into a state of real happiness? There is nobody doubts of it. And now is not a state of sin and wickedness a state of slavery to the Devil and our own lusts, and a very great evil? nay, is it not the greatest evil in the world? Nobody, that hath any serious sense of things, will deny it. But now, according to the aforesaid doctrine, that the righteousness of Christ is so imputed to believers that they are thereby accounted righteous without being so in their own persons, and that this is all the righteousness required to qualify us for heaven; I say, according to this doctrine, after all that Christ hath done or suffered for believers, they may remain in this evil state for ever; they may continue all

their lives long under the tyranny of vicious habits, and be perfect bondmen to the Devil, (if vile affections and lusts can make a man so,) and go so into the other world. Christ hath indeed by his death delivered them from his Father's wrath, and the outward punishment they were obnoxious to for their sins; and he hath likewise by his life covered them over with an external robe of righteousness. But still, for any thing he hath done to the contrary, that venomous nature of theirs may still remain, and they may carry it with them into heaven, where, notwithstanding all the glories they may be presumed to be encircled with, will be a plague and a torment to them for ever. Either therefore Christ must be supposed to have intended the destroying of all sin and naughtiness out of men, as well as that it should not be imputed to them; to have meant the furnishing their souls with an inward, real righteousness and purity of their own, as well as the clothing them with a righteousness of his; or else he hath but done them half that kindness which he pretended to have designed them when he came into the world: he is but half a physician; he hath palliated our sores and our diseases, but he hath not removed them.

But, secondly, the doctrine that asserts that the life of our Saviour was not designed for an example to us, but to be a fulfilling of the law for us, so that thereby we are excused from our obedience to it; the doctrine that asserts that the righteousness of Christ's life is made so much ours by faith that we need not conform ourselves thereto in our practice, doth not only render Christ imperfect or unsuccessful in his undertaking, which was that I said before; but, which is far worse, makes it look as if he came

into the world with a very ill design. This is a most blasphemous consequence, but really it cannot be avoided; for let any man say, Suppose a man had really a design to serve the interests of the Devil's kingdom, and to promote and encourage all sorts of vice and wickedness and debauchery in the world; how could he do it more effectually than by this method, namely, to possess the world that he was sent from God, and that he was sent with this intent, that by the innocency of his life he might make amends for the wickedness of theirs; that all his virtue and good qualities and laudable deeds should be as much theirs, and they should be as much rewarded for them as if they had done them themselves, though in the mean time they did not one of them nor any thing like them; and that all the crimes they should commit should be put to his account, and they should never answer for them, he having once for all paid the general score of the sins of mankind. Only this condition he strictly required, that they should firmly believe all this, that they should with the greatest confidence and assurance imaginable apply all those benefits, all those privileges to themselves, that they should from their very hearts disclaim all good deeds of their own, and throw away every rag of their own righteousness, and shroud themselves entirely under the robes of his righteousness. If they did but this, all was safe, nothing should hurt them; no sin, no habits of sin, though never repented of, should do them mischief. On the contrary, if they thought of any other terms of obtaining God's favour, they were under a great and dangerous mistake: I say, how could any man do a greater disservice to all piety

and virtue, and all the interests of true religion? How could any man take a more effectual course to destroy the fear of God from among men, and to let in a flood of impiety and wickedness to overspread the earth, than to preach such a doctrine as this, supposing he had the means to make himself believed? And yet, according to the principles before laid down, such as this in effect must be the doctrine of our blessed Saviour. I dare say there is none that calls himself a Christian can be so bad as to own these consequences; but yet I do not see how the antinomian doctrine in this matter can be acquitted of them.

Well; but it will be said, Are there not texts of scripture that do plainly seem to countenance this antinomian doctrine, as you call it? Doth not St. Paul say, that *to all believers their faith is imputed for righteousness without works?* And doth not the same St. Paul say, that *he desires not to be found in his own righteousness, but in the righteousness which is of God by faith?* What will you say to these texts?

Why, I say, give me but leave to lay these texts fairly before you, and then you yourselves shall judge whether they make any thing for the doctrine I am now disputing against. I am indeed the more willing to take these two texts into consideration, because those I am now dealing with have them always in their mouths, and do in a manner lay the whole stress of their cause upon them.

The first text is in Rom. iv. 22. There St. Paul tells us, that *Abraham's* faith *was imputed to him for righteousness;* and, that *it was not written for his sake alone, that it was so imputed to him; but*

for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus from the dead.

Now from this text, say they, it is plain that faith is imputed to all Christians for their righteousness; nay, more than that, the apostle tells us in the sixth verse of this very chapter, that *the blessedness of Christians is described by this, that righteousness is imputed to them without works:* so that here is a righteousness imputed, and a righteousness imputed without works; how then dare we speak any thing against an imputed righteousness?

I answer, Nobody, that I know of, speaks any thing against imputed righteousness in the apostle's sense, but only against Christ's righteousness and virtue and innocence and holy conversation being so imputed to us, as that there is no need of our righteousness and virtue and innocence and holy conversation, which I am sure was not the apostle's sense, nor ever entered into his mind. But I pray consider this text a little more narrowly, and be not carried away by the sound of a word. St. Paul here tells us, that *Abraham's* faith *was accounted to him for righteousness*, in the third verse; in the fifth verse, that *it was reckoned to him for righteousness;* and in the twenty-second verse, that *it was imputed to him for righteousness.* All these phrases mean the same thing. But is it here said, or is it said any where else, that Christ's righteousness was reckoned, or counted, or imputed to Abraham for righteousness? nay, is it said any where in the whole scripture that Christ's obedience or righteousness should be accounted or imputed to any men in the world for their own righteousness? not a word of it! There is a vast difference (if any body will mind)

between these two propositions or expressions: To a true believer his faith is reckoned or imputed for righteousness; and this, To a true believer the righteousness of Christ is reckoned and imputed for his righteousness: I say, there is a vast difference between these two propositions: the meaning of the former is, that under the covenant of grace (which was procured by our Lord Jesus Christ) God is pleased to accept of a true, sincere faith instead of a perfect obedience to the law. Whosoever truly believes in Jesus Christ, and shews forth the fruits of his faith by a sincere though not perfect obedience to God's commandments, as Abraham did, (and without this his faith is not a true faith,) such a man is justified, is accounted righteous before God, as much as if he had performed all the righteousness of the law of works; his faith is accounted to him for righteousness.

But when we say that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us, as if it was our righteousness, (which is the other proposition,) it is capable of no other meaning but this; that, upon account of Christ's obedience to God's laws, God will account us righteous, as much as if we had obeyed them ourselves. The holiness of his life is so made ours by imputation, that God esteems us holy persons upon the account thereof, though we are not really so in our own persons.

The former proposition, of faith being imputed for righteousness, is certainly true, and I know no Christians that deny it.

But the latter proposition, of Christ's righteousness being imputed to us, hath no foundation in scripture; nay, it is certainly not true in that sense

of the words that the natural, proper grammatical construction of them leads to. And thus much for the first text.

Well then, (saith the objector,) it seems you plead for a righteousness of your own, distinct from Christ's righteousness: I must confess we do so. What then? Why, says he, that other text of St. Paul will for ever confute and quash all such pretensions; for doth not he, in the third of the Philippians, verse 8, (which is the other text I am to consider,) doth not he there expressly say, *I count all things as loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord;* and *I desire to be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith?* Doth not St. Paul here expressly declare against and renounce all righteousness of his own? I grant he doth so. But what then? If you will seriously mind what kind of righteousness of his own he here declares against, and what righteousness that is which he desires to be possessed of, you will certainly be convinced that he is so far from opposing our doctrine, that he earnestly pleads for that righteousness we are all this while contending for.

Let us look a little back into the occasion and scope of these words. His design is, in this chapter, to set forth the excellency of the Christian religion above the Jewish, and to shew how mean, nay, how altogether insignificant all those things the Jews so much gloried in were in comparison of Christianity. And he here reckons up all the magnificent things they boasted of, and wherein they placed their righteousness, and tells us, that upon those accounts he

had as much reason to be confident of his own estate towards God, as any of them had: *If any other man*, saith he in the 4th verse, *thinketh he hath wherein he might trust in the flesh, I have more: I was circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin; as touching the law, I was a Pharisee;* (which was the strictest sect among the Jews;) *and as for my zeal in the law, I was a persecutor of the church;* (than which nothing could be more meritorious among the Jews;) *and as for the righteousness which is by the law, I was blameless:* there was no man could say but that I lived up to the precepts of the law of Moses, and was blameless in my conversation, as far as the letter of it required. But what, after all this? should I plead my confidence in any of these things? No verily, (as he goes on in the 7th verse,) *but those things which were gain to me, I accounted loss for Christ;* that is to say, all these prerogatives, my birth, my profession, my sect, my reputation, my strict way of living, which might be thought to be of great advantage to me; now that I am come to the knowledge of Christ, I abandon them all; I see that they are nothing worth; nay, I account them as a loss, as things like to be rather a hinderance to me than a gain: *Yea doubtless,* (as he goes on in the next verse,) *I account all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and I account them but dung, that I may win Christ.* And then comes in the verse that I am now concerned with, *that I might be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is by the faith of Je-*

sus Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

This is the passage that is brought to establish the doctrine of imputed righteousness; this is the text that doth so utterly blast all righteousness of our own.

I pray mind what sort of righteousness of our own that is which St. Paul here would not be found in. Is it not the legal, pharisaical righteousness? is it not the righteousness which is by the law? are not these his very words?

I pray mind what righteousness that is that he would be found in. Is it not that *righteousness which is by the faith of Jesus Christ?* He doth not say the righteousness of Jesus Christ: it is not that that he would be found in; (if he had said so, that indeed had been to the purpose;) but that *righteousness which is by the faith of Jesus Christ;* that is to say, that righteousness which is to be obtained by believing in Jesus Christ, by becoming a Christian. Certain it is, that St. Paul doth not here oppose an inherent righteousness to an imputed one; but an outward, natural righteousness, to that which is inward and wrought in a man by the Spirit of God. The righteousness that he would be found in is not the righteousness of Christ, made his, or imputed to him; but it is a righteous, holy state of soul, wrought in him by the Spirit of God through the faith of Jesus Christ.

The clear sense then of these words is this; That which above all things I desire is, to *be found in Christ;* that is, to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ: *not having my own righteousness, which is by the law;* that is to say, not being content with those

outward privileges, and that outward obedience which by my own natural strength I am able to yield to the precepts of the law, (which is that righteousness in which the Jews place all their confidence, and by which they expect to be justified before God,) but that which is by the faith of Jesus Christ; that is, the righteousness which I desire, and in which only I shall have the confidence to appear before God, is, that inward spiritual obedience to his laws, which he doth require as the terms and conditions of his favour and acceptance, and which I can never attain to but by the faith of Christ, by becoming a Christian. This is none of my own righteousness, but the righteousness of God, as being revealed from heaven by Jesus Christ, and wrought in me by God's Spirit accompanying the preaching of the gospel. And as it is his gift, so he will own it, and reward it at the last day. I will appeal to any man that will carefully read this whole passage, whether he must not in his conscience believe that this account I have given is the true sense and importance of the apostle's words. And now, whether they make any thing against our being righteous and holy, as well as Christ was righteous and holy; against the necessity of walking as Christ walked, do ye judge.

But I am sensible I have made too long a digression upon these two texts: but I thought it worth the while to give a plain account of them. I now return to my argument: and that which I have further to say upon it shall be despatched in a few words.

My business is to press upon you the obligation and necessity of following Christ's example, if we

would approve ourselves Christians: and in order thereunto, besides what I have before said, I would desire you to take into your consideration these two or three things.

First, I beseech you, consider how solemnly our Saviour and his apostles call upon you to the practice of this. As for our Saviour, I might quote many passages in his discourses to this purpose; but I will only take notice of two, because I said I would be short. And I mention one of them the rather, because the beginning of it seems to favour the pretences of those men we have been now talking of.

The text is in the eleventh of St. Matthew, ver. 28, 29. There our Saviour makes a general and solemn invitation to all sinners to come to him: *Come unto me*, saith he, *all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* What words can be sweeter than these? Whoever is oppressed with the guilt of his sins, it is but coming to Christ, that is, as they usually expound it, believing in him, and casting themselves wholly upon him, and they shall have their burdens taken off, and be at perfect ease and rest. But what follows? *Take*, saith our Saviour, *my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and* then *ye shall find rest for your souls.* Here our Saviour shews that he means something more by coming to him: coming to Christ, in his sense, is to take his yoke upon ourselves, (and a most easy and comfortable yoke it is,) and to learn of him, to imitate his example, to frame our minds and spirits and tempers to a conformity with his mind and spirit and temper; to be meek and lowly in heart as he was;

and so in all other instances. This is that which every one must do, if he means to find rest for his soul.

Again, when our Saviour gave that unheard-of instance of kindness and condescension to his disciples in vouchsafing to wash their feet, pray mind the application he makes of it, John xiii. 14, 15. *I have given you*, saith he, *an example, that ye should do to one another as I have done unto you. If I*, says he, *your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, then ought ye to wash one another's feet.*

You see by this, that his example was intended by him to have all the force and obligation of a command; only in this it had the advantage, that it was more moving and persuasive.

As for the apostles, it would be endless to repeat all the passages wherein they propose our Saviour to us as a pattern and example of living; how they bid us to *look up to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith*, lest at any time we should be weary and faint in our minds; how they call upon us to walk in his steps, to be followers of him; nay, to be followers of them, because they were followers of him! How often do they mention his patience, his humility, his meekness, his boundless love and charity, as arguments and encouragements to us to proceed in those virtues! Lastly, they lay such stress upon this point of conforming ourselves to the example of Christ in all things, that they make the very notion of discipleship to him to consist in it: *Whoever*, says St. John, 1 Ep. ii. 6. *saith that he abideth in him*, (that is, pretends to be a disciple of his,) *ought himself also to walk even as he walked:* without this, he cannot be accounted a disciple of Christ.

And indeed it must needs be true in the reason of the thing: which is the second thing I would desire you to consider. For what is it to be any one's disciple, but to be a follower of him in the mystery that he professeth. If a man sets up for a master in any science or speculative matters, in that case, to be a disciple of his is to embrace his notions and sentiments of the thing he pretends to teach. If he be a teacher of some art, or matters of practice, why then his disciples are those that conform themselves to his methods and ways of practice in that art. This is the notion that all the world has of a disciple.

If now we would know what it is to be a disciple of Christ, the way must be to know what it is that Christ professeth; what mystery it was that he pretended to teach to the world. If his business among mankind was only to teach men some new notions they knew not before, then I grant there is no more required to the being his disciple, than only to believe and understand those notions he delivered: or if his business was further, to gather together a number of men that should openly profess such a set of propositions, and to oblige them thereto, they should all of them, upon the entrance of that profession, be baptized with water, as a solemn ceremony of initiation into it; then indeed to make one a disciple of his, it would be sufficient that he was a professor and a baptized person, let him live what way he pleased. But now, since, as all must acknowledge, the chief skill that our Saviour professed was that of living; the main art and mystery he pretended to teach was the art of ordering our conversation so as that we might please God, and be accepted of him; there must go more to the making a

disciple of his, than either belief, or profession, or baptism. A man, if he will deserve that name, must live as he lived, must conform himself to his manners and precepts of living, and way of walking, otherwise he doth not follow him in the art he professeth, and consequently is no more his disciple than a man because he wears a turban is the disciple of Mahomet, though in all things else he be a Jew; or than a man of old was a Stoic, because he, like them, walked in the Portico, though in the mean time he held the principles of Epicurus.

This is so plain a thing, that though we may sometimes, with a great deal of pains, cheat ourselves, yet it is impossible to impose upon any indifferent person in the matter. Let us suppose a heathen to have read the history of our Saviour, and from hence to be informed what his pretences and designs were in the world; what good precepts he gave for the conduct of men's conversation; what a kind of life he led; how innocent, sober, chaste, meekspirited, patient, humble, devout, charitable a person he was: will he not from this conclude, that surely all that pretend to be the disciples of this Jesus are obliged, not only in conscience, but in decency, and for their own credit, and the credit of their Master, to live as he lived; or, if they do not, they shew they do not belong to him? Shall any of us be able, with all the art we have, let us pretend never so much devotion to our Lord, let us make never so many reverences at his name; though we extol him to the skies, though we profess we glory in nothing so much as in being his disciples, though we are zealous for his religion above all things, nay, though we swear we would die for him if there was occasion;

yet, I say, can any of us, with all these artifices, make the man believe that we are truly his disciples, if we lead our lives in a contrary way to what he did? May he not truly and justly reply to us; I hear your words indeed; you are very civil and complimental to this person whom you call your Saviour; but you must pardon me, if I cannot believe you have any real respect or inward veneration for him! I cannot think that you either truly believe in him, or expect to be saved by him; for, if you did, you could not possibly live so contrary both to his precepts and his practices as I see you do. He, as your own story tells, was a meek, modest, quietspirited man; but you are all fire, when you are in the least provoked. His character was, that he did not only forgive great injuries, but did good to those that did them, and prayed for his bitterest enemies: but you, on the contrary, on the least affront, meditate a revenge, and think your honour never safe till you have effected it. He despised the world, and was very well contented with his innocent poverty: but you are for getting no more than all you can, and that too by all base and unjustifiable ways; and, when you have done all, you are not contented with what you have, but still would have more. He was much a stranger to all bodily pleasures, and very moderate in the use of the good things of this life: but you cannot live without luxury and uncleanness and drunkenness. How can these manners comport with the being a disciple of Jesus?

I must confess, I cannot see how the subtilest man can answer these reproaches of a pagan. Either therefore let us live like Jesus Christ, or throw away the name of his disciples: to keep that, and yet not

do the other, is a piece of as great hypocrisy and impudence as any man can be guilty of.

But, thirdly and lastly, to conclude all. If neither of these two foregoing considerations will persuade us to set ourselves to the imitation of Christ's example, let it be considered further, that there is an absolute necessity that we should do it, even to such a degree, that we are no way capable subjects of the mercies of Christ, or of any of the benefits he hath purchased for mankind, if we do not.

The proof of this is that known maxim of the apostle in 2 Cor. vi. 15. *What fellowship hath light with darkness? or what agreement hath Christ with Belial?* All Christians do agree, that whatever they are to hope for in another world was purchased for them by Christ, and that he is the bestower of it; and that the sum of it consists in this, that they shall be where Christ is, and shall for ever enjoy him. Now I ask, can any man reasonably expect that Christ should have any kindness for him, or confer any of the benefits he hath purchased upon him, if he be of a different spirit and temper from what he was? Can he think that Christ intended any drop of his blood, that was shed for man's salvation, for those ungrateful wretches that had so little regard to him that they would not so much as endeavour to frame their minds and souls to his will, and copy out his example in their lives? No man can with reason think he did: for if the spirit and temper of Christ was really amiable, was to be esteemed and beloved, then the contrary spirit and temper is to be despised and hated. And therefore, if we will suppose our Saviour to make true estimates of things, he must not, he cannot have any kindness for those that, not-

withstanding all the obligations he hath laid upon them, do still retain and hug those evil qualities, which of all things in the world are most contradictory to his holy nature.

But supposing we could imagine that our Saviour was as unaccountably kind as some presumptuous men would have him; supposing he would save those very persons that were most opposite and contrary to him in their natures, and continued to their dying day so to be; yet it ought to be considered, whether there be not a repugnancy in the nature of the thing, that such men should be saved or made happy by Christ. My meaning is, how good soever Christ's intentions may be supposed towards them, yet their own qualities, which they carry out of the world with them, will put an eternal bar to their salvation. For, as I said before, from St. Paul, *what concord hath Christ with Belial?* If the supreme happiness of a Christian be to be with Christ, and to enjoy him, what a small portion of happiness are such men like to have in the other world! nay, rather, what uneasiness and torment shall they not have, if they be put into that state! Can it be any pleasure to them to be continually in the company of one whom they cannot heartily love, and whose nature and temper is as contrary to theirs as fire is to water? Are they like to have any enjoyment of such a person, nay, will it not rather be unsupportable to them to be near him? Can baseness, and lust, and sottishness, and villainy and filthiness, receive any delight or gratification from the society and communication of perfect purity and holiness and charity?

Ay; but it may be said, that at the moment of their deaths, Christ may, in kindness to them, quite

change their nature, and make them like unto himself; and then all is well.

I answer, if it be so, yet still what I assert is true; namely, that every one must be, sooner or later, conformed to the life of Christ; must be possessed of his nature and temper, before he is capable of the happiness that he hath purchased for us.

But then, since the effecting so sudden, so miraculous a change in us, as is here pretended, is by no means to be expected; since Christ has made no promises, given no encouragement to hope, that any that live unlike him, shall, dying, be made like him; it will infinitely concern us all, while we are alive and in health, to conform ourselves to the example of our blessed Lord, and to possess ourselves of that spirit and those qualities that he was so remarkable for in the world: which is all that I meant to press upon you; and God Almighty grant we may all do so, &c.

SERMON II.

ON

1 PETER II. 21.

——*leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.*

MY argument here is the imitation of Christ, or the following Christ's example. And in treating of it, I proposed to do these three things:

First of all in general, To shew the great obligation that lies upon all Christians to follow Christ's example.

Secondly, To explain the extent of this obligation; how far, and in what instances, Christ's life is an example to us, and doth oblige us to imitation.

Thirdly, To propose some of those virtues that our Saviour was most eminent for, and which are of the greatest use in human life, and seriously to recommend them to your imitation.

The first of these points I have already despatched, and shall not now trouble you with a repetition of any thing about it.

I proceed therefore to the second, which is to give an account how far, and in what instances, Christ's life is an example to us, and doth oblige us to imitation.

And here the case that comes to be discussed is this: Are we Christians so to propose the life of Christ as the pattern and model of ours, as to take ourselves to be obliged to do every thing that our Saviour did, and in the same manner that he

did it? or, if we be not bound precisely to do this, what rules and measures are we to take in this matter?

It is a very weighty case, and deserves to be very carefully considered; because, indeed, upon the well adjusting of it does depend the resolution of a great many particular cases of conscience, which daily happen in human life, and which, if men have not right notions of this general point, do frequently bring both inconveniencies upon themselves and harm to the public.

Now what I have to offer for the resolution of this case, I shall, for my more distinct proceeding, comprise in six particulars. And the first of them is this:

I. Our Saviour cannot be supposed to have given us an example in all the passages of his life, because in some of them it is not possible for us to imitate him. Several of our Saviour's actions were wholly extraordinary, and the immediate effects of a supernatural, divine power. Such were all the miracles and wonderful works he wrought for the confirmation of his doctrine, and giving testimony to the world that he was *a Prophet sent from God;* as his curing all diseases, casting out devils, opening the eyes of the blind, making the lame to walk, and the dumb to speak, feeding many thousands with a very small quantity of meat, raising the dead to life, fasting forty days and forty nights; with many more instances of the like nature. Now in these things, I say, we cannot pretend that Jesus Christ was an example to us, because they are above the powers of human nature to perform.

Some of the Quakers indeed heretofore have been

so extravagantly vain, as to think they could do these things by the power of the divine Spirit that was in them; and accordingly, as I have read, some of them have attempted to raise a dead man out of his grave; and others to fast forty days, as our Saviour did. But their shameful disappointment in the first enterprise, and their losing their lives in the second, hath been a demonstration that it was not the Spirit of God (as they pretended) that they were acted by, but the spirit of error and delusion.

II. But, secondly, neither was our Saviour an example to us in all those actions of his life in which we are capable of imitating him. He did several things which it is not warrantable for us to do; and he did likewise several things which, though we can be supposed to do them lawfully, yet we are not obliged to do them; nay, oftentimes it would be highly inconvenient if we should. This is my second proposition; and the reason of it is this: our Saviour was not in the same circumstances that we are in this world. He had a particular office committed to him by his Father, for the discharge of which many things were necessary, and many other things highly convenient to be done by him, which would by no means be allowable in us; and such of them as would be allowable, yet would be very indiscreet.

As for instance; our Saviour, as being *a Prophet sent from God*, was vested with an authority to reform religion, and the abuse of God's worship among the Jews; and by virtue of that commission and authority, we see he *drove the buyers and sellers out of the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-*

changers, and the seats of them that sold doves; these being great profanations of the temple, which was designed, as our Saviour tells them, to be a *house of prayer*, and not a place of merchandise. But now for any of us to do such an action, who are private persons, and have no commission from God, nor warrant from public authority, though the cause of religion was never so much concerned, would be a thing highly reprovable. I mention this the rather, because this fact of our Saviour's hath sometimes been pleaded for the countenancing of all outrageous, tumultuous, seditious actions, that bold and mistaken zeal could prompt a man to. Men have thought that, by this precedent, they were warranted to affront the ministers of religion, even when they were doing their office, to disturb the public service, to tear the Liturgy, to deface church windows and monuments, to defile the font and the holy table, and to do any extravagant action that tended, as they thought, to the reformation of religion, and the pulling down (as their phrase was) of *Dagon and superstition*. But supposing these things they were so hot against to be as corrupt and superstitious as they would have them; supposing them to be great abuses in the worship of God; to be very rotten rags of popery; to be every whit as idolatrous as they were really innocent and decent and convenient; yet this would not in the least justify such actions: though their design was good, and the work they went about was good, the whole action was very bad. Whoever makes a riot, or disturbs the public peace or worship, or affronts authority upon account or pretence of redressing abuses in, or reforming of religion, unless he can give evidence that he hath

an immediate commission from God, (having none from man,) and shew too the seal of that commission, namely, all manner of signs and wonders and miracles, however zealous he may be for religion, yet he hath not *a zeal according to knowledge;* and God will be so far from rewarding him for it, that he stands justly accountable both to God and man for his extravagancy.

But to leave this, and to give another instance or two in the matter we are upon. Our Saviour, we know, after he was baptized and entered upon his public ministry, left his former employment and habitation: for before that, he lived at Nazareth, and, as is probable, exercised the art of a carpenter; for he is, in the sixth of St. Mark, verse 3, called *the carpenter* by the Jews. I say, he left his employment and habitation, and from henceforward gave himself in a manner wholly to an ambulatory life, going from place to place, to do good to all persons, and to preach the gospel to all he met with. But now for any of us to imitate him in this, to leave our callings, and our employments, and our relations, and our way of living, and to travel about from town to town, though we proposed to ourselves ends of never so great charity to mankind in so doing, yet it would be so far in us from being a praiseworthy action, that if all of us thought ourselves obliged to it, it would destroy all trade and commerce, and settled way of living in the world. This kind of life was indeed necessary to our Saviour, and to his apostles too, because the discharge of the office committed to them did require it. Our Saviour's errand was to preach the gospel of his kingdom in all places among the Jews; (and this

office he entered upon at his baptism;) and the apostles, they were to preach the gospel, and to gather churches throughout all nations. But now, where the gospel is already preached, and churches planted, and the government of them settled, for any one to imitate this practice would probably be so far from doing good, that it would do hurt; at least those that undertake it are no ways obliged to it.

Thus again; our Saviour chose a life of great meanness and poverty: he had not a house to lay his head in, but lived wholly on the charity of others; nay, he obliged his apostles likewise to quit all their fortunes, and follow him. This now in him and them was very reasonable, because it did very much tend to promote those ends for which our Saviour came hither; did much conduce to the spreading of the gospel, and gaining it entertainment in the world. But now, when all things are settled, and the gospel is become the law of a nation, and the profession of it is not only freed from danger and persecution, but is creditable and advantageous, for any man, upon account of conformity to our Saviour's life, to vow a voluntary poverty, or to *give all that he hath to the poor*, and to go about seeking a livelihood from the charity of others, as he hath no warrant for it, so will it never procure him a greater reward in the other world; unless we suppose God will reward a man for deserting his station, which Providence has put him in, and rendering himself less useful to the world, and indeed (which is the tendency of it) doing his part toward the dissolving civil society.

You see, in the circumstances our Saviour was placed in, the person and character he bore, and the

office he was to execute, ought thoroughly to be considered, before we pass a judgment what actions of his are to be imitated by us. If we be in a different state and condition, in a different quality from what he was in, it will often fall out, that the same action will not become us that was extremely proper and decent in him.

To give one instance more of this that is very considerable.

I have already said, that our Saviour acted in one respect as a public person; that is, he was sent by God with authority to reform religion in the world. But now this office of his did only extend to affairs of religion. He did not pretend any jurisdiction or authority as to civil causes and concernments, as he that now calls himself his vicar doth. Those he left in the same hands in which he found them; in that respect he was only a private person, and was as obedient to the civil government and the laws as any in the country where he lived. And hereupon it was, that when a man came to him to desire him to divide an inheritance between him and his brother, that it seems they could not agree about, he solemnly refuses to have any thing to do in the matter, saying to him, *Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?* Luke xii. 14. And again, when the woman that was taken in adultery was brought before him, (John viii.) and he was asked his opinion, whether, there being sufficient evidence of the fact, she ought not to be stoned, as the law of Moses had commanded, he, instead of passing sentence upon her, endeavours to shame the accusers, bidding those of them that were without sin to cast the first stone at her. And when, upon this unexpected an-

swer, they all sneaked away, and the woman was left alone, all the censure that he passed upon her was this, that since she was not already condemned, neither would he condemn her; only let her be careful that she sinned no more. Now, I say, this kind of deportment and these answers were very prudent and proper in our Saviour, who was no ways concerned in the administration of justice, or the deciding controversies between man and man about their civil rights and titles. But if any of his followers, who is a judge or a magistrate, and intrusted with the execution of laws, should take this carriage of our Saviour's for a precedent for him to walk by, and should give such answers when justice, according to law, is demanded of him, he would very ill employ his power, and could no way answer it to God or man.

Well; but since by this discourse it appears that there are some actions of our Saviour's that cannot be followed, and some that must not, or at least cannot, with prudence and convenience, be followed; the question is, what measures we are to take in this matter? How shall we know when to imitate our Saviour, and when not?

III. By way of answer to this in general, I lay down my third proposition; and that is this: The great rule that is to direct us in this affair is our Saviour's precepts and commands. In what matter soever our Saviour has laid his commands upon us, in that we are bound to follow his steps: but where we have no law, no command, as to the particular matter, there we may or may not imitate him, according as the reason of the thing directs, or the parity or disparity of our circumstances with those

of our Saviour doth fall out. The truth is, the proper end and design of examples is rather to invite and encourage to their imitation, than to oblige. No man can be directly obliged in conscience to follow another man in his actions, merely because he sees him do them; for then he would be obliged indiscriminately to do whatever that person did, which, as I have shewed before, would be intolerable. But we therefore take ourselves obliged to follow any person's example, either because that person hath authority over us, and hath commanded us to follow him in such and such things; or whether he have commanded us or no, we are sensible that those instances, wherein we take ourselves obliged to follow him, are really matters of duty to us, and bound upon us by some law of God. So that, in proper speaking, it is the law of God, or of our Saviour, commanding us to do or to forbear such and such particular things, which creates our obligation to follow his example in those things, and not his example itself: thus, for instance, if it had not been our duty, by Christ's command, to pray constantly, to forgive injuries, to deny ourselves, and to take up the cross, and the like, his example in these matters would not have been of obligation to us. But now, since by his laws all these are matters of duty to us, hence it comes to pass that we are indispensably obliged to follow his example in every one of these instances, even to that degree that we cannot call ourselves Christ's disciples if we do not.

The main thing therefore that is to be done by us, in order to our taking right measures about the imitation of Christ's example, is, to inform ourselves carefully about all the points and branches of our

duty, as they are laid down by our Saviour in his holy gospel. When once we are rightly instructed in these, we shall seldom be at a loss to know what those things are in the life of our blessed Saviour, that we are to charge ourselves with the imitation of; and what those things are that do not so immediately concern us to put in practice.

IV. But, fourthly, though, as I said, it is our Saviour's laws that give force and obligatoriness to his example, yet this doth not hinder but that we may likewise receive great benefit and advantage, and sometimes directions also, from actions of his, that in strictness we either cannot, or are not bound to imitate. For all these actions of his, both those that were wholly miraculous, and those that related to and were pursuant of that public office that was committed to him, and those also that seemed the most indifferent and arbitrary, and in which he hath given us no command; I say, all these do mightily help us to make a judgment what manner of person our Saviour was; what his spirit and temper and qualities were. Now certainly in these we are bound always, and without exception, to imitate him, because he himself hath over and over again commanded us so to do; though we are not bound to do those particular actions by which that spirit and temper, and those qualities were expressed. So that take any action of our Saviour's that is recorded in the whole gospel, whether it be such a one as we are bound to imitate him in, or such a one as we are not bound, yet it will be, some way or other, of great use to us in the conduct of our lives.

I shall explain my meaning in two or three instances.

When we consider the nature and kind of those many wonderful works that our Saviour wrought for the confirmation of his doctrine, and find they were not merely signs and prodigies, and such supernatural operations as did only tend to amaze and astonish people, (as those were that are said to have been wrought by Apollonius Tyaneus,) and likewise that they did not consist in judgments, and in executing the vengeance of God upon sinners and wicked men; (as did those miracles which Moses really wrought when he brought the children of Israel out of the Egyptian slavery;) but they were all of them miracles of mercy, actions of kindness and charity and beneficence to mankind; that though they were primarily intended to shew that *he was a Prophet sent from God*, yet they were done in such a way, that still somebody or other had benefit by them: either some blind man was restored to his sight, or some sick man cured, or some lunatic brought to his right wits, or some hungry man fed, or the like. I say, though we cannot propose to ourselves to imitate our Saviour in these miraculous works of his, yet we may, from the nature of these works, be notably instructed what kind of spirit our Saviour was of, and what kind of dispensation that was that he came to set on foot in the world. It appears plainly from hence, that our Saviour was a preacher of mercy and a lover of mercy; that he came to save men, and not to destroy them; that his kingdom was to be a kingdom of love and peace; and that he himself was so far from being wrathful and vindictive in his temper, (though never man was more provoked than he was,) that, on the contrary, he was beyond all expression kind, and benign, and com-

passionate, and longsuffering, and took the greatest delight in the world to do good to all that came in his way.

Now this very observation cannot but be of great use to us; for it will teach us to set a higher value upon those qualities of beneficence and charity, and will let us see that we are not of the Christian spirit, if we do not study to do good to all, according to the ability that we have; and that though we cannot work miracles for the relief of necessitous and miserable persons, as our Saviour did, yet we should be as kind and as serviceable to them as we can.

Thus again, when we consider that action of our Saviour's, of driving the buyers and sellers out of the temple, we cannot but from hence observe what a great zeal our Saviour had for the honour and the reverent usage of places dedicated to God's service, and how concerned he was that they should not be profaned and put to a common use. Now though this action of his, as I said, will not warrant us to do the same, because we have not the same authority that he had; yet it will teach us that we ought every one of us to behave ourselves reverently in the house of God, and in our sphere, and, as far as we lawfully may, to do our endeavours to vindicate both places and things that appertain to God as much as we can from profanation and contempt.

Thus again, when our Saviour washed the feet of his disciples; this action of his doth not pass any obligation upon us to do the same, in a literal sense, either to our servants or friends: yet it plainly shews what a mighty stress he laid upon all actions of humility and condescension and obligingness, in that, for the recommending such actions to us, he

would stoop to so mean an office as the washing his disciples' feet. Now this will still add a greater weight to the command that he hath given us in this matter. For thus we are to reason; (as he himself applies this action, and it is such a reasoning as hath the force of a demonstration;) If Jesus Christ, our great Lord and Master, descended so low as to wash the feet of his servants, then sure the best of us ought not to think ourselves too good to serve our brethren even in the meanest instances.

Lastly, suppose any of us, in a case where our rights and privileges are concerned, should be doubtful how we are to behave ourselves, whether we should insist upon them, or whether we should depart from them; and the case is such, that we have no express command of God to determine us either way: why now, in this case, we have an example of our Saviour that will be of great use to us, because it shews what kind of principles he himself then acted by, though he gave no command in the matter. For when the tribute-money towards the repairs and service of the temple was demanded of him by the Jewish officers, though he made it appear to them that he was not obliged to pay it, as being, by a peculiar privilege and personal right, free from that imposition, yet rather than offend them, (as he expresses it,) rather than do a thing that men might make an ill construction of, and that might encourage others to refuse the payment of their dues, he orders St. Peter to lay down the money they demanded, though yet a miracle must be wrought before that money could be come by. See this history in the seventeenth of St. Matthew, ver. 24.

Here now is an everlasting rule given to all Christians how they are to behave themselves in such cases as these; namely, that it is better to depart from our rights than from our charity; and that privileges are not to be insisted on against a public good, or when the insisting on them proves matter of scandal, or gives ill example to others.

The sum of what I have said upon this head comes to this: though the general rules and measures of our following Christ's example be his laws and precepts, yet all his actions, if we do not so much attend to the particular action as to the mind and spirit with which it was done, will be of wonderful use to us, both for the reforming our judgments, and directing our practice, and for the encouragement of us in all godly and holy living. We ought in all instances to be of the same spirit and temper that our Saviour was; and, if we are sure that we are in the same circumstances that he was, then to do as he did. And in any case that happens to us, where we have no direct law of our Saviour's to guide ourselves by, we may then have recourse to his example; (I mean the example of his genius and temper;) putting the question to ourselves, How would my Lord have done in this case, had he been in the same circumstances that I am now in? And if we resolve sincerely to act as we believe he would have done in the case, according to those notices we have from the history of his life, of his humour and qualities and temper, there are few cases wherein we shall fail of good direction.

V. My fifth proposition about this point is this: In a matter where Christ hath laid his commands upon us, yet we are not bound to come up to the

precise measures of our Saviour's life; we are not obliged to that degree of exactness and perfection in our actions that he attained to: it is enough for us that in these matters we follow him as far as we can; that we endeavour to imitate him according to our measures, though we never reach that excellency, that heroical virtue, that he gave proof of in all his actions.

The reason of this is plain. As our Saviour was an extraordinary person, so the instances he gave of his virtue were sometimes extraordinary also. And the duties he recommended to others he himself performed, not only in full perfection, without any mixture of sin and infirmity, but also sometimes in such instances, and with such circumstances, as the weakness of our present state and our course of life in the world will not allow us to imitate.

To give an instance of this. He was much in his devotions to God; so ought we, because it is a plain command. But he was so intense and fervent in those devotions, that we may reasonably believe no wandering thoughts, no distractions of mind did ever discompose or interrupt him. Why in this too we should imitate him as far as we can; but yet to attain to the same degree of fixedness and fervency of spirit we must never expect, and therefore certainly we are not bound to it.

But further; so great was the ardour and flame of his devotion, that he spent whole nights in retirement and prayer to God, as the gospel informs us. But now for us to think ourselves obliged to do so would be very unreasonable, and might draw great inconveniences upon us. It is sufficient for us that we be as earnest and as diligent and as frequent in

our devotions, both public and private, as our strength and our necessary occasions will allow; but to tie up ourselves rigidly to so many hours, or to whole nights of prayer, in imitation of our Saviour, is more than sometimes our constitution will bear, or, if it would, there is no obligation upon us to do it.

VI. Lastly, to all this let me add one proposition more, and then I have offered all that I have to say upon this argument; and it is this:

That in those very particular actions of our Saviour, that he hath obliged us to imitate him in, yet, as to the circumstances of them, he hath left us at liberty; and we are to govern ourselves by reason and prudence, or by the custom of the country where we live, or by the laws of our superiors.

Thus, for instance, our Saviour at his last supper *took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, Take eat, this is my body which is given for you: do this in remembrance of me:* and so likewise the cup after supper. This action now the ministers of the gospel are to imitate our Saviour in as long as the world lasts, because he hath solemnly commanded that they should do so. But they are not bound to imitate him in all the particular circumstances of this action of his; they are not bound, when they celebrate this holy supper, to do it just in the same manner, and at such a time of the day, and in such a sort of place as our Lord himself did, because this is nowhere commanded either by Christ or his apostles; nor indeed are these things at all of the essence of the action, but particularly separable from it and adventitious to it. I the rather choose to mention this instance, because it hath afforded matter for many scruples

and much dispute in our days. How comes it to pass, say some, that you of the church of England oblige all those that receive the sacrament among you to receive it in the posture of kneeling? Is not this contrary to the practice of our Saviour? Did not his apostles receive it at his hands in a different posture, namely, in a table posture, and not in a praying posture? And is not every religious action of our Saviour's to be imitated as far as we are capable of imitating it? This is the great argument that is brought against our usage of kneeling at the sacrament; and is of such force with some, that, upon account thereof, they dare not join in our communion.

I will not here enter upon a vindication of the unexceptionableness, lawfulness, decency, and antiquity of this posture in receiving the sacrament, and the fitness of it above all others, but shall just consider the matter so far as my present proposition leads me to speak of it. And that which I would say is this: Those people that make the objection against kneeling that I have now mentioned, do not seem to consider the difference of an action and the circumstances of an action. Gesture or posture is not an action, but the circumstance of an action: let us therefore be never so much bound to imitate our Saviour's or the apostles' actions, yet it doth not from hence follow that we are bound to imitate their gestures or postures in those actions. And if any will affirm that we are, they ought at least to give us some sort of proof for it, either from scripture or the sense of the primitive church. The scriptures, I am sure, can produce none; and the primitive church, if we may judge of their sense by their practice, is quite against them.

But I wish those that insist upon this would give me an answer to this question: Why should we be more obliged to imitate the posture of our Saviour and his apostles, in receiving the holy sacrament, than to imitate the time, the place, the habit in which they did it? Ought there not to be as much regard had to these circumstances in any action as to the former? Are they not all of equal moment and consideration? If I must be bound to partake of the holy supper only in that posture in which it was instituted and taken at first by our Lord and his apostles, then I must likewise, by parity of reason, be bound to receive it in such a place as they did, that is to say, not in a church but in a chamber. I must be bound to receive it at the time that they did, that is to say, not in the morning and fasting, but after supper. The minister that gives it me ought to have on such a habit as our Saviour had, that is to say, a long woven robe without seam, and not a gown or surplice. But now since none do think themselves obliged to observe these things, why should they think themselves so tied up as to the other? unless they can shew that there is something peculiar and particularly obligatory in this circumstance of gesture which there is not in the other three. But this no man has ever yet shewed, nor, I believe, ever will.

But I would further ask these our brethren, Do they themselves observe that law which they would impose upon others? Do they use that gesture in taking the holy supper that our Saviour and his apostles did? If what they say be true, namely, that the apostles received the sacrament at our Saviour's hands in a table posture, then I am sure they do not.

For the posture which our Saviour and his apostles used in taking their meals, was not sitting, as we practise, but lying or leaning on a couch, as may be proved from several texts of scripture; and particularly from the account that is given by St. John of this very last supper of our Saviour's. But now I never heard that any of our brethren used to receive the sacrament in this posture, but they do it either sitting or standing; which is a quite different gesture. But in answer to this, they say, that we are not obliged to observe precisely that particular posture that our Saviour used, but only in general that posture which is used at meals, because he did so. Now the custom of our country is to take our meals sitting, and therefore in using that posture at the sacrament we do sufficiently follow our Saviour's example.

To this I reply, first, that this is *gratis dictum;* those that say this, can give no reason why they say so. If the principle they build their notion upon will hold water, it will every jot as much prove the necessity of imitating Christ in the particular posture he used, as of imitating him in the general, that is to say, observing the common table posture used in our country.

But further; if the general received posture at meals be the only allowable posture of receiving the sacrament, (as must be concluded from this doctrine, if any thing can be concluded from it,) then what will become of them that receive the sacrament standing, (as many do;) that is no more the common posture at meals than kneeling is. It is sitting that hath universally prevailed in our country; and therefore to receive the sacrament standing, or in any other posture but sitting, must, according to this doctrine, be

irregular; which yet, I hope, none of them will affirm. But, lastly, to conclude; pray let this be considered: Why should the custom of any country be sufficient to make standing or sitting to come in the place of lying or leaning at the sacrament, and yet the public law of a nation shall not be able to do as much for kneeling? Shall not a law made by public authority, and confirmed by long usage of the church, have the same force to establish kneeling in the place of sitting, (there being no more unlawfulness in the one posture than in the other,) as a custom brought in by little and little, and without any public authority, had to bring in sitting in the place of leaning?

But I am sensible I tire you with being so long upon this head. All the apology I have to make is, that I thought it would serve some purpose to make this matter as plain as was possible.

I have now done with my cases of conscience concerning the extent of our obligation to follow Christ's example, which, you see, I have resolved in six propositions.

The next thing I am to do is, to propose some of those virtues which our Saviour was most eminent for, and which are of the greatest use in human life, and seriously to recommend them to your imitation.

I pray God give a blessing to what has been said.

Now to God, &c.

SERMON III.

ON

1 PETER II. 21.

—— *leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps.*

I HAVE made two Sermons upon this text. In the first of them I laid before you in general the great obligation that lies upon us to follow our Lord's example. In the second, I endeavoured to shew the extent of this obligation; how far, and in what instances, Christ's life was an example to us; in what cases we are obliged to the imitation of it, and in what cases not. I now come to the third thing I proposed upon this text, and which indeed is the principal thing I intended when I first pitched upon it; and that is, to give a more particular account of our Saviour's life, as it was designed for an example to us; and to draw some sort of picture of him, as to those virtues and qualities which he was most eminent and remarkable for, and in which he chiefly proposed himself to our imitation, and most earnestly to recommend them to your practice.

And indeed very great benefits and advantages shall we reap to ourselves by seriously employing our thoughts and meditations upon this subject. O what a mighty check would the frequent consideration of our Saviour's holy and immaculate life give to the temptations of vice and lust with which we are daily assaulted! and how powerful a spur and incitement would it be to us vigorously to pursue all

manner of virtue and holiness! We should think no attainments too big for our courage and endeavour, so long as we had but the holy Jesus before our eyes. To consider what victories he obtained against sin and the world, and the kingdom of darkness, would inspire us with resolutions worthy of those that pretend to be the followers of so great a Master; nay, we should not only receive encouragement, but also very considerable assistances and directions for the conduct of ourselves in this Christian warfare, from a due consideration of this example of Christ. If we were thoroughly instructed in the spirit and temper of our Saviour, it would be hard to impose upon us with any false notions of religion, or new-fangled modes of worship: we should be able to give every duty its just value, and not be apt, as it too frequently happens, to lay a greater stress upon some things than God has laid upon them, and to make others more inconsiderable than they really are in God's account. In a word, we should not want a very good and useful rule to steer ourselves by in all cases and circumstances that we happen to be engaged in, where the express laws of God seem either to be short or too obscure. Let us all therefore be diligent and frequent in reading the Gospels of the New Testament, wherein the history of our Saviour's life is recorded: and let us from hence thoroughly acquaint ourselves with the manner of his conversation, and observe what a person he was; what kind of genius and disposition he had; what were the great ends and designs he pursued in all his actions; what duties of religion he was most zealous in; how in such and such occurrences he behaved himself: and, when we have so done, let

us in these things seriously propose him to our imitation; so shall we not fail of the aforesaid benefits.

Now, if we consult those sacred writers, we cannot, in the first place, avoid observing how devout a person our Saviour was; and that both in public and private. Of his devotions in public he gave a very early instance, when being brought to Jerusalem by his parents (which was when he was but twelve years old) he constantly frequented the temple: that was the place where they found him after they had three days missed him, being in their journey homewards: and when they told him how long they had been seeking him, and seemed to complain that he had absented himself from them, his answer is very remarkable, Luke ii. 49. *How is it*, saith he, *that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be in my Father's house?* Our translation doth indeed render it, *Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?* But this sense, in the judgment of the most learned critics, doth not so well suit with the signification of the words: the phrase ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρός μου being most naturally to be expounded *in my Father's house;* and so some of the best interpreters, both ancient and modern, have translated it. This then is our Saviour's answer: Ye needed not, O my parents, have gone far to seek me; for if ye had well considered either the office I am designed for, or the duty I owe to my heavenly Father, ye might easily have concluded that his house, his holy temple, was the place where ye might have found me, it being there that my business chiefly lies. And what he now declared he made good in his practice all his life after. He was

constantly present at the public assemblies appointed by law for the worship of God in all places where he had his abode: nor do we ever find that either he himself held separate religious meetings from the established Jewish church, or encouraged others so to do. On the contrary, when he was in the country, he failed not to frequent the synagogues on the sabbath day, which were the places of public worship there: and when he was at Jerusalem, he was, as he himself tells us, *daily in the temple;* though yet he knew that the synagogue worship was not commanded by any express law of God, but was only of human institution: and as for the temple, though it was a place of worship of God's own appointment, yet he knew and declared that the service of it was just upon the point of expiring, and that the time was coming when men should no longer worship there, John iv.

How religious was he in observing all the solemn festivals of the Jewish church, not only those that were of God's appointment, (as the sabbaths, and the three great feasts of the Passover, Pentecost, and the Tabernacles,) but those also that had no other authority but what the laws of the land could give them! as we have an instance in the feast of the Dedication, for the solemnizing of which we find our Saviour making a journey to Jerusalem, though yet that festival was only of human appointment, John x. 22.

How zealous an assertor was he of the reverend usage of places devoted to God's service! for he would not endure that the house of God should be put to a common use, but whipped out those that bought and sold in the temple, (though yet it was

only such things they bought and sold as were for sacrifices and oblations to God,) declaring that the house of God was a house of prayer to all nations, and therefore ought not to be made a place of merchandise.

How ready was he to submit to all the rates and taxes that were imposed for the repairs of the temple, and the defraying of the charges of the public worship there! insomuch that though he was very poor, and was besides a privileged person, yet he would be at the expense of a miracle rather than not pay the half shekel that was demanded of every son of Israel, as a tribute to the house of God, Matt. xvii. 24.

Any one now that reads and considers these passages of our Saviour's life, cannot but see a wide difference between his principles and temper and carriage in these matters, and those of many of his followers in our days. Several there are among us that would be thought Christians, who are so far from being duly and constantly attendant on the public worship of God, that they rarely join in it at all, except invited by curiosity, or to save themselves from the reproach of being infidels, and of no religion. Others are zealous for a public worship, and do constantly attend it; but unhappy it is for them and for us that we cannot worship God in the same way, but are parcelled out into several communions. Sure every good man should think, that it is not a little thing that should divide us from the established church, when he considers that our Saviour paid such regard to the public establishments, that he made no scruple of communicating in the services and liturgies of the temple and synagogue of his time; which

yet certainly were not the perfectest and most unexceptionable, since the Scribes and Pharisees had the chief management of them.

I might go on in comparing our Saviour's practices with some modern ones, and shewing the difference between them as to all the other instances I have mentioned out of his life: but I take no delight in such a subject, and therefore will pursue it no further.

All that I meant by the passages I have quoted was, to give you some kind of taste of what nature our Saviour's public devotion was; from whence you may easily gather, that if we mean to copy out our Saviour's example, and to be devout as he was, it will concern us to take all opportunities that our occasions will allow us of worshipping God in public, and not think it sufficient to say our prayers in private. It will concern us, especially on the solemn days appointed for this end, never to absent ourselves without very great reason. It will concern us likewise to worship God in public, according to the laws and constitutions of the place where we live, unless it do plainly and evidently appear to us that there is something in the established worship that we cannot join in without sinning against God. It will concern us also, when we are at the public assemblies, to behave ourselves decently and reverently, as remembering we are in the presence of God; and at all other times likewise to make a difference between the house of God and houses to eat and drink in, as St. Paul distinguishes them. Lastly, it will concern us to contribute, according to our measures and proportion, to the maintenance of a decent, solemn worship of God among us. All these

particulars may, I think, be gathered from these passages of our Saviour's life that I have now quoted to you.

These instances may serve to give you a taste of our Saviour's devotion in public, and of the nature of it, and of what principles he was acted by, and what his temper and carriage was in matters relating to the outward worship of God. Application hereof I make none: I leave that to be made by every one's self, as he finds occasion for it.

But further, which deserves our special consideration: our Saviour was not more exemplary in his devotions in public than he was in private ones. He was much conversant with God by prayer and meditation. He frequently took occasions of retiring himself from all business and company, that he might the more freely contemplate, and the more intensely fix his thoughts upon spiritual things, and the more ardently pour out his soul to God, and enjoy communion with him; and very considerable portions of time did he spend in such devout privacies. When the time came that he was to enter upon his office, which was at his baptism, we find he prepared himself for it by a retirement of forty days, which he spent in fasting and prayer, in conflicting with the Devil, and in all the exercises of faith and trust and devotion towards God; (in imitation of which our forty days fast of Lent was appointed.) Here he gained his first victory and triumph over the Devil and his kingdom; and here he experienced all the sweetness of an uninterrupted converse with God and angels, and found the influences of it his whole life after.

And as he thus began the great work committed

to him, so in the same manner he carried it on, though never any lived a more public life than he did; though never any was more crowded with company, or had his hands fuller of business than he had; yet nevertheless he would either find or make his times for his privacies and devotions: if he could not have it in the day, yet would he take it from his rest in the night; nay, sometimes in such portions as to continue a whole night in these his retirements, as you may see in the first of St. Mark, ver. 35. Luke vi. 12.

This practice of our Saviour's may convince us how necessary it is that we should be frequent and diligent in the performance of our private devotions; that we often take occasion to abstract ourselves from worldly business, that we may the better be at leisure for pious thoughts and meditations, for devout prayer and other religious exercises. If our Saviour found it needful so to do, who had attained to the perfection of virtue, who had a constant presence of mind, who was master of himself and his business, and could not be supposed easily to be prevailed upon by any temptation either from without or within; how absolutely needful will it be for us to put this duty in practice, who are pitiful, sorry, weak creatures, apt every moment to be distracted by worldly objects, and to be drawn away by the temptations and allurements of sin that are round about us!

People may imagine what they please about the mighty feats that may be performed through the strength of a good resolution. But when all this is done, they will find that there is no getting such a victory over their lusts and corruptions; no living

such a Christian life as the gospel requires of us, without the practice of earnest and ardent prayer to God, and a constant attendance to reading and meditation, and other such devout exercises. Though we have formed our purposes, as we think, never so strongly, and doubt not but we shall be sufficiently able to stand upon our guard; yet, if we do not daily apply ourselves to the throne of grace for strength and influence and support; if we do not frequently take times to recollect and renew our resolutions, and fortify our minds by strong consideration, by repeating to ourselves the great obligations we have to God, and the absolute necessity there is of forsaking our sins and pursuing a course of virtue and holiness; and, lastly, by fixing our thoughts on the vast, immense rewards that await us at the end of our pilgrimage, if we behave ourselves worthily: I say, if we do not daily give ourselves to the practice of these things, how good soever at the present our intentions and purposes may be, yet there is little hopes we shall make any great progress or advancement in Christianity, but shall at last insensibly sink down into a state of carelessness and indifferency as to those matters, if not return to a worldly, sensual, or vicious life.

But, secondly, let us propose our Saviour to ourselves as a person that, as he was very devout towards God, so was he also very diligent in the business he had to do in the world. He did not so spend his time in solitude and abstractions, as to hinder the discharge of any of the works of his calling. On the contrary, he lived more publicly because of his frequent privacies. His retirements served for no other purpose than to make him more

active and vigorous in doing good when he came into company. He so managed his devotions towards God, that they were no obstructions, but a great furtherance of the duties he owed unto men; and hereby, as he gave us the true notion and measures of a perfect life, so did he effectually confute the superstitious fancies that too many of his followers have entertained concerning religion.

There are a sort of men, we know, in the world, that place the perfection of Christianity in living at a distance from the concernments of the world. With them, to serve God in the best way is to dwell in a wilderness, or to be cloistered up within the walls of a monastery, and to sit loose from all the business of common life. And so far hath this notion of religion obtained, that none are accounted among the number of the religious but those that have taken upon them this kind of life. I wish there were not also some among us that are too much popish in this respect, though they yet sufficiently hate the name of papists. Are there not those that make religion wholly to consist in doing of duty, as they call it? If they do but go to prayers often enough, and hear sermons enow, and spend their time in reading godly books, and such other exercises and amusements, they think it is all that is required of them; it is with them the sum and perfection of religion.

God forbid that I should blame any body for doing these things! on the contrary, I would encourage every one in the practice of them: for, as I said before, they are necessary duties; so necessary, that it is impossible to be religious, to any great purpose, without a conscientious respect unto them.

But this is the thing I blame, the thinking that we have no other work to do in the world but this. The being so taken up with these things, as to neglect all the other weighty business of our callings, and the duties which our families, our neighbours, our country do call for at our hands. As God hath not confined religion to cloisters and deserts, so neither hath he shut it up in churches or closets: but he hath so contrived it that it may flourish in our cities and in our fields, in our shops and in our markets, even in all the places where our employment lies. God never intended that religion should be an enemy to business and an active life; but rather an instrument to promote the one and encourage the other. We then serve God best when we make our religious offices and contemplations a means to advance the diligent pursuit of our callings and the doing good in the world: we are then most devout when we most benefit others: and it is the most acceptable sacrifice to God to be useful in our generations.

This, I am sure, was the thing that our Saviour proposed to himself: for though, as I said, he had his time of retirement, wherein he gave himself up to meditation and prayer, yet the design hereof was, that he might the next moment more illustriously appear in the world as a pattern of good works. His devotions did not spend themselves in unprofitable ardours, and for his own content and satisfaction only; but they influenced his actions, and made him more busy, more vigorous in the discharge of that employment that God had committed to him: nay, whenever the duties of his calling and the duties of devotion, properly so called, came into competition,

we find that he made the latter give way to the former; as we have a famous instance in his preferring acts of charity before the exact observation of the sabbath: and he backed his practices herein with a memorable axiom, which he had made a standing rule in all such cases, that *God will have mercy, and not sacrifice.* Not that to offer sacrifices was not a duty, or that God would refuse them when they were devoutly offered; but that of the two he rather delights in works of mercy; and that if both cannot come together, the former must give place; we then best expressing our love to God, *whom we have not seen,* when we express our love to men, *whom we have seen,* as St. John tells us.

And this leads me to the third thing, wherein we are to propose our Saviour to our imitation, (and it shall be the last I shall consider at this time,) namely, his boundless love and charity.

Of all his other virtues and excellent qualities this was most conspicuous in him, and this was that which he most recommended to our practice. His whole life was but one continued, illustrious expression of kindness and charity. Never was any person in the world known to be so sweet, so obliging, so compassionate, so kind, as was our Lord Jesus. How eager, how insatiable a thirst had he to do all the good he could to mankind! how did he seek opportunity to oblige and to benefit every body! He went up and down to see who stood in need of his presence and assistance, either for soul or body; and whoso did, never failed of it. So intent was he upon doing offices of charity to others, that he often neglected himself, and would rather deny himself the due satisfactions of nature, than that they should

not be benefited. How many sick persons did he restore to their health, blind to their sight, and lame to their joints, and dumb to their speech, and possessed and distracted persons to their right minds! nor was he less kind to the souls than the bodies of men. How zealous, how constant, how laborious, how indefatigable was he in preaching the glad tidings of God's grace and favour to all poor souls! how did he take every opportunity of making men better by his discourses! No conversation that he was engaged in, though the subject of it was never so ordinary and indifferent, but he would improve it to the purposes of doing good to men's souls, taking every occasion that offered itself in discourse to raise up the minds of the hearers from carnal and sensible things, to spiritual and heavenly.

O with what plainness and condescension would he instruct the ignorant! with what power would he convince gainsayers! with what freedom, and with what authority would he reprove vice and sin wherever he found it!

O how gently would he deal with weak persons, never breaking a bruised reed, nor quenching the flax that had the least smoke in it!

O how affectionately would he embrace all those that came unto him, and how tenderly would he even weep over those that obstinately refused their own mercy! Witness the kind tears that ran down his cheeks when he beheld his incorrigible city: *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,* saith he, *thou that killedst the prophets, and stoned them that were sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thee as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not! but now your house is left unto you*

desolate: and then the gentle Jesus wept! What should I say more of the large, intense, universal charity and good-will with which our Saviour endeavoured to oblige the world; the time would fail to reckon up the instances of it: the sum of all is, as he lived a miracle of love, so he died one. That same Jesus, who had every moment of his life been doing good to some one or other; and that same Jesus, that had never received any other requital from the world for all this goodness, but affronts and injuries, contempt and reproaches; yet this same Jesus, so far was his love from being abated by all this unworthy usage, that, as if what he had hitherto done for mankind had signified nothing, he offers up his precious life as a ransom for the world: he voluntarily submits to all the outrages that malice could invent, to lewd mockings and buffetings and scourgings, to an unjust sentence of an unjust judge, to a cruel, painful, ignominious death in ignominious company!

This did the most innocent, the most virtuous, the most noble of mankind do, that he might purchase happiness for the world, not for his friends only, but for his enemies, even those very enemies that thus contumeliously treated him; and at the same time that they were expressing the utmost of their cruelties and malice against him, loading him with new torments, did not only forgive them, but, with a generosity without example, prayed to God to forgive them also; nay, and made excuses and apologies for them; *Father*, saith he, *forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

O how heroical was this goodness! how unparalleled was this kindness! Who can declare the

greatness and the strength, the height and the depth of thy love, O thou great Benefactor to mankind! we can never utter it, but we stand amazed at it, and we will for ever adore it. O holy and immaculate Jesus! blessed, for ever blessed be thy glorious name, O thou King of love, for thy inexhausted treasures of love towards us, and the excellent example thou hast hereby given to us!

And now we have some part of the picture of our blessed Saviour, though it must be confessed it is very rudely drawn, and infinitely short of the original; yet these are the lineaments in which he himself desired chiefly to be expressed and represented to the sons of men. This is the temper, and these are the qualities which he was most of all to be known by, and which God most valued in him, and which he himself hath most laid his commands upon us to imitate him in.

And O that we would so long and so earnestly fix our eyes upon this loving Saviour, as to be transformed into his love!

O that we were so affected with his goodness, as ourselves to become all goodness, all kindness to our brethren! O that this flame of love, that was in him, would seize upon our hearts, and utterly turn out of them all self-love and narrowness of spirit, that we, with as extended arms as Jesus, did embrace the whole creation of God! O when will the time come, that, laying aside all piques and quarrels and contentions, all hatred and animosity, all parties and factions, all wrath and bitterness and evil-speaking, all malice and censoriousness, all sourness and moroseness of temper, we shall *be kind and affectionate one to another, bearing with one another, and*

forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven us; doing all the good we can, obliging all sorts of persons as much as is in our power, being easy of access, ready to do kindnesses, relieving, according to our abilities, every one's necessities, and, as much as in us lies, setting forward the salvation of all men.

This is to imitate Jesus; this is to walk as we have him for an example; and in vain do we call ourselves his disciples if we do not thus walk, if we do not possess ourselves of this spirit and temper. If we would have recourse to Jesus himself, and desire to know of him what evidences he would have us give to him and to the world that we are truly his followers and disciples, he hath already resolved us, John xiii. 35. *Hereby*, saith he, *shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.* And if we further desire to know of him how we must *love one another*, what kind of love he expects from us, he hath in the foregoing verse told us that also: *A new commandment*, saith he, *give I unto you, That ye love one another;* even *as I have loved you, that ye love one another.*

Away therefore with all other marks of Christianity that fall short of this. Let us have never so much knowledge in the mysteries of the gospel; let us have never so strong a faith in Christ, though it were even effectual for the removing of mountains; let us be never so orthodox in our opinions; let us preach and pray never so fluently and affectionately; nay, though we spoke with the tongues of men and angels; nay, though we bestow all our goods to feed the poor, and give ourselves to be burnt for martyrs; yet, if we have not the true love and charity that

was in Jesus, all signifies nothing. This the apostle St. Paul does largely and eloquently set forth to us in the whole thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians.

And so much for my third general point. Other particulars remain to be spoken to, which I shall reserve to another occasion: in the mean time I will conclude this Discourse with a Collect of our Liturgy:

"Almighty God, who hast given thy only Son to "be unto us both a sacrifice for sin, and also an en- "sample of godly life; give us grace that we may "alway most thankfully receive that his inestima- "ble benefit, and also daily endeavour ourselves to "follow the blessed steps of his most holy life, "through the same Jesus our Lord."

To whom, with the Father, &c.

SERMON IV.

ON

1 PETER II. 21.

—— *leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.*

THE last time, I gave an account of some of those particular virtues and qualities that our Saviour was most eminent and remarkable for, and in which he chiefly proposed himself as an example to us; and here the first thing I instanced in was his exemplary devotion, both public and private; the second was his diligence in the discharge of the duties of his calling; and the third was his fervent love and charity to mankind. I now proceed to some others.

The fourth great instance wherein we are especially to propose our Saviour to our imitation is his wonderful humility. In this quality, and that other of meekness, (which never fails to accompany it, and of which I shall speak more by and by,) he himself doth particularly recommend himself as a pattern to us in that memorable passage in the eleventh of St. Matthew, last verse; *Come unto me*, saith he, *all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest for your souls.*

And certainly a greater example of humility and lowliness there never was, though he knew that, both upon the account of the excellency of his person and the dignity of his office, he was the greatest

of the sons of men, yet he made such condescensions as never man did.

Was it not an astonishing condescension for the greatest Prince in the world to make his first entrance upon earth in no nobler a guise and appearance than as the son of a poor maid espoused to a carpenter, and to take up his first lodging in no better a place than a manger? Was there ever so great an expression of lowliness of mind, as that he who could command all the world should become a servant to all the world? and yet, thus did our blessed Saviour all the time he lived. He that was the Sovereign of men and angels, yet *took upon him the form of a servant:* he, of whom God himself had said, *Let all the angels of God worship him;* and of whom it is said, that, *de facto, the angels of God came and ministered unto him*, yet saith of himself, that *he came not to be ministered unto, but to minister:* and this saying he made good in all the periods of his life; for while he was under the tuition of his poor parents, he faithfully served them, being, as St. Luke tells us, *subject unto them.* So subject indeed, that, if we may believe Justin Martyr, he submitted himself to follow his father's trade and occupation; and of this truly we have some intimation in the sixth of St. Mark. For whereas in other places he is, by way of reproach, called the carpenter's son, in that place he is called *the carpenter;* from whence one may probably gather, that during his minority he professed the same art that his reputed father Joseph did.

After he came to his own disposal, and to a more public employment, he still made good the character of a servant; he had nothing of outward pomp or

greatness in his circumstances, that might attract men's eyes, and recommend him to the esteem of the world. On the contrary, the way of living that he chose was mean and poor, his attendants a company of fishermen, his income and revenue what providence sent him, and the charity of others bestowed upon him, living from hand to mouth, and waiting upon God for his daily bread. It is true, the beams of his divinity shone sometimes so brightly through this cloud of his outward circumstances, in the mighty works that he did, that the people were struck with admiration of him, and thought him worthy of a throne and empire, and would have invested him therewith. St. John tells us, that once they would by force have made him a king. But our humble Saviour would not so quit his innocent poverty and privacy, but withdrew himself from them, leaving them to guess at what he afterward declared to Pilate, that *his kingdom was not of this world.*

But the meanness of his appearance, and his contempt of worldly greatness, were not the only instances of his humility: indeed if they had, he had not been so recommendable to us upon that account; for though he might prefer a cottage before a throne, yet in that cottage he might be imperious enough among his own domestics. But so far was he from that, that after he had several times rebuked his own family for their contentions about precedence, and their disputes who should be greatest, telling them often that he that was the least and humblest among them should be the greatest in his esteem, he at last, in his own person, gives them such a surprising example of humility and condescension, as, if it was considered, would for ever put an end to all their ambitious

thoughts and pursuits. He washed the feet of his disciples one by one, and told them withal, that the reason he did it for, was, that they might do so likewise one to another: *Ye call me*, saith he, John xiii. 13, 14, 15, *Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you.* O how ought the consideration of these things to take down that high spirit, as we call it, that reigns in too many of us; to abate that tumour of pride and ambition and vainglory, which is too apt, God knows, to blow up our minds! O what a rebuke hath our Saviour here given to all that we call great, and brave, and rich, and magnificent in the world! how little valuable in the eyes of God hath he, by this his example, made it appear to be! and how ridiculous hath he rendered those lofty looks, and that surly stateliness, that too often attend it!

Can any one that calls himself a disciple of Christ, and seriously reflects upon these passages of the life of his Master, be easily proud of that wealth or those titles that fortune has given him above others? Who art thou, that thou shouldest value thyself upon the nobleness of thy birth or of thy relations, when thy Lord was born in the stable of an inn? Who art thou, that thou shouldest pride it in thy rich clothes, and thy great possessions, and thy splendid equipage, and thy sumptuous way of living, and despise all others that are inferior to thee in these respects, when he whom thou adorest was meanly clad, and lived in great poverty, and had not so much as a house to lay his head in? Who art thou, that thou

shouldest be so difficult and inaccessible, and so mortally offended, if every punctilio of place and ceremony and address be not observed towards thee, when the Person, by whose name thou callest thyself, and whose life thou pretendest to copy out, vouchsafed even to wash the very feet of his servants, and commanded thee to go and do likewise? Not that we are to think that these instances of our Lord's humility and self-denial do oblige any of his followers according to the letter: far be it from any Christian to think that he is bound, by virtue of our Saviour's example in these particulars, to throw away his rich attire, or to take upon him a voluntary poverty, or to lay aside his titles of dignity, or to refuse those respects or distances that are due to his quality. No, no; Christianity doth no way favour the principles of Quakers or Levellers; it certainly allows, and the constitution of human affairs necessarily requires, that there should be different orders and degrees of men; that there should be superiors and inferiors, and men of all ranks and qualities; and that every man, according to his degree, should have his different way of living, and a different respect paid to him. Those that are placed in a higher sphere ought to be distinguished by several outward badges and characters from the common crowd of mankind: and whoever hath a plentiful portion of outward goods allowed him in this life, may, without offence, freely enjoy them, not only for the supply of his necessities, but even for his conveniency and delight. A man may be a good Christian, and yet wear rich cloth, and fare sumptuously, and have a great retinue, and receive the respects, and keep the distances that are due to the post and station he maintains in the world.

All that the example of our Lord calls for at our hands in this matter is, that we do not one jot the more esteem ourselves, or undervalue others, upon account of these outward things; but that we be affable and courteous, and ready to serve others in the meanest instances, whenever it is in our power; that we be poor in spirit in the midst of our wealth, or state, or bravery; that we use this world as if we used it not; that we keep our hearts so unentangled by it, so loose from it, that we never forget God, nor our neighbour, nor ourselves, so long as we possess it, and are heartily willing to part with it the next moment, if the cause of God or virtue doth require that we should. Whoever is thus qualified, thus disposed and prepared, is a true follower of our Lord Jesus in his humility and poverty and condescension, let his outward circumstances and way of living be never so pompous and magnificent.

But besides our Saviour's infinite condescension, he gave us other evidences of a great humility, which it will highly concern us to imitate him in. He was perfectly dead to the praise of men, and studied only to approve himself to God. So far was he from ostentating himself, from catching at the applause of the people, that he seemed studiously to conceal all those qualities and actions of his that might procure it. When he had done any great work that was praiseworthy, he was so far from publishing it himself, that he often laid a strict charge upon those that had received the benefit of it, that *they should tell no man.* No man, with a thousandth part of his excellencies and perfections and heroical actions, ever made so little a noise in the world; nay, even then, when his virtues and

wonderful works became so illustrious that they could not be any longer concealed, yet even then he was so far from pleasing himself in this, or assuming any praise to himself upon account thereof, that, on the contrary, he attributed nothing to himself, but gave all to his Father, ascribing the whole glory to him: *I can do nothing*, says he, *of myself; the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own, but the will of my Father which hath sent me.* When the woman, being struck with admiration of his wonderful preaching and his wonderful works, cried out in a transport, *Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps that gave thee suck!* see how he turns this acclamation, that seems to reflect some glory upon himself, to quite another purpose, namely, to the encouraging the by-standers in virtue; *Yea, rather*, says he, *blessed are those that do the will of my Father.*

This now is that divine humility we are all to labour after. We are not to think them the humblest persons that make the largest declarations against themselves, and entertain all companies with their own infirmities; for this possibly may be only an art to catch praise: no, nor those that are really sensible of their several defects, that know their own poverty, and how far a great many others do outstrip them in several accomplishments; for this is not always so much an effect of virtue, as of the soundness of a man's understanding; for it would argue the man to be a fool, if he had other thoughts of himself: much less is it the perfection of humility to think one's self the worst, or the meanest,

or the most contemptible of mankind; for it is certain such a notion of a man's self cannot be true in all instances; there can be but one of mankind that is the worst, or the meanest, or the like. And therefore, if all men be obliged, upon the account of humility, to think themselves that man, it is manifest that all of them, except one, hath false apprehensions of himself. And sure it can be no part of any man's virtue to think otherwise of himself than he really is. But he is the true humble man, and most imitates our Saviour, who, though he knows he is possessed of many excellencies and virtues which perhaps others have not; though he knows he doth many commendable actions which ought justly to render him esteemed, and taken notice of by others; yet he is not at all the more puffed up for this; his designs are braver and greater than to seek himself in any thing that he doth: vainglory, and the desire of praise, is no ingredient in any of his actions. On the contrary, provided he but do the work that God sent him hither to do, and maintain the post in which he is placed, he cares not how meanly and contemptibly he be thought on in the world. So far is he from being his own trumpeter, or from making popular applause the end of any thing that he doth, that, so that the good be done, he matters not whether any body knows that it was he that did it: nay, though instead of the acclamations of the neighbourhood, he should be pursued with their censures and reproaches, he is not a whit disturbed, so long as that which caused them was well intended.

But though he be little concerned for his own praise, and be indifferent whether he hath it or no, he is highly concerned that God have his. And

therefore, as he very well knows and considers that whatever virtue he hath, whatever good action he doth, is wholly owing to the mercies and favour of God; so is he ready always to attribute the glory of all to him, looking upon himself as a poor indigent creature, nay, as one that had been worse than nothing, had he not been made what he is by the divine bounty. So that, with the lowest prostration of his soul, he continually adores the riches of God's grace to him, acknowledges himself to be infinitely unworthy of the least of his mercies, and in every instance of his life, whatever he doth, whatever he possesseth, whatever he suffereth, that any way seems to redound to his own praise, he refers it all to the goodness of his heavenly Father, continually saying with David, *Not unto us, O God, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise.*

Thus have I given you some kind of description of the humble man, as our Saviour hath in his own person represented him. I now pass on, in the fifth place, to another thing, wherein he hath proposed himself to our imitation, and that is, his extraordinary meekness.

This, as I said before, is one of those qualities that he would have us learn of him; *Learn of me,* saith he, *for I am meek and lowly in heart.* And indeed he that was so eminently humble, as has been said, must needs be a very meek person; this virtue being a natural and necessary consequence of that: all anger and wrathfulness and hastiness of temper, being generally the effects of pride, and an overweening conceit and fond love of ourselves. If we truly had those lowly thoughts of ourselves that we ought to have, we should not be easily provoked

or put out of our temper by any thing that could be offered to us.

But to come to the point. Well might our Saviour bid us learn of him to be meek, for no one else could ever so teach us as he did. There was nothing of harshness or ruggedness in his disposition; but we may truly say of him, that he was the quietest, gentlest, evenest-tempered man in the world: that which we call good-nature was in him in perfection. He would neither give any offence to others, nor take any offence at any thing that others could say or do to him. As he would not be provoked, so neither would he willingly provoke any. On the contrary, he was full of humility and courtesy, affable and sociable, ready to yield all innocent compliances to the persons with whom he conversed: so that in this sense he was a truly complaisant person, as we express, if we may use such a word of such a person.

His history affords instances enough for the making this good; witness his receiving little children to his embraces and benedictions, whom yet his disciples repulsed as troublesome: his treating kindly all that came to him, and answering their questions, though sometimes impertinent enough, (except where they proposed them on purpose for a snare to him:) his conversing freely with all sorts of men, even publicans and sinners, and accepting invitations from them to their tables, whom the supercilious Pharisees so much despised, that they would not come near them: his vouchsafing his presence even at a marriage feast, and even adding to the entertainment by a changing of their water into wine when their own provision of wine was spent. Thus gentle,

thus complying was our blessed Saviour in all his conversation. Nor was he more studious to avoid giving offence to others than he was careful not to take any offence at them: though never any received greater provocations to anger and impatience than he did, yet never was he known to be moved thereby: his spirit always kept the same calmness and evenness, nor were ever any undecent, passionate speeches heard to come from his mouth. How many interruptions in his discourses did he patiently bear! how much injurious, contumelious language did he unconcernedly put up! O how great was his mildness, when the barbarous, inhospitable Samaritans shut their gates against him, and denied him the common civility of passengers! he took no notice of it, but meekly went his way. His disciples indeed took it not so well, but were for calling for fire from heaven, (as Elias did,) to consume the town; but our Lord was so far from approving their motion, that he sharply rebuked that spirit of revenge that was in them: *Ye know not*, saith he, *what spirit ye are of;* the gospel spirit and dispensation is not like that of Elias, but a spirit of meekness, and patience, and forbearance, and forgiving of injuries. This is the spirit you must be acted by, if you mean to be my disciples.

And a great instance of this kind of spirit did he afterwards give us, when he was in the basest manner betrayed into the hands of his enemies by one of his own disciples and domestics. Instead of reproaching the traitor, or giving him bitter, reviling terms, as most others in such circumstances would have done, all he said was, *Friend, wherefore art thou come? Betrayest thou the Son of man with a*

kiss? And when at the same time, through the zeal of one of his servants in his defence, an officer that came to apprehend him happened to be wounded, so far was he from approving this act of passion, that he stretched out his hand and healed the man. And the same meekness of behaviour that he shewed at his apprehension did he continue all the time of his trials, and to his death. No affronts that the rude soldiers could put upon him, no buffetings, no scourgings, no mockeries, no spitting upon him, no reviling terms, could in the least work him to any discomposure of spirit, or make him once complain, or so much as to give out one harsh word against those that thus treated him: so true was that which the prophet foretold of him, *He gave his back to the smiters, and his cheek to them that plucked off the hair. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth.*

O what an example have we here of meekness, and patience, and gentleness, and longsuffering!

O how can we hear or read these things of our Saviour, and not be ashamed and angry with ourselves that we are so much unlike him in these qualities! How can we call ourselves his disciples, and yet continue of so froward, so peevish, so wrathful, so revengeful a temper as we many of us are? In good earnest, I doubt there are many among us that pass for very good Christians, that are exceedingly to be blamed upon this account; though they seem to be very well disposed towards God, and to have obtained some victory over many of their other sins and evil affections, yet this of anger and fretfulness and impatience they fatally lie under. Every little thing is able to vex them, and quite puts them out

of their humour; they will be angry upon the least occasion; a laughter, or a jest, an unexpected answer, an unforeseen accident, is sufficient to make them lose their temper; if a child be froward, or a servant be negligent, or those they converse with be impertinent; if any thing happens cross to their business, or a small loss doth befall them, or a little pain seizes them, or the like, they are quite out of patience, and oftentimes they are put into a rage; and, when they are so, they care not in how unseemly language they vent their passion. O how far is this from the temper of the meek and patient Jesus!

But still further are they from it, and much more to blame, that make it a piece of greatness of soul and good-breeding to be quarrelsome and implacable and revengeful; that account it a point of honour to be sensible of the least affront, and not to put it up without full satisfaction. What! say they, pocket up an injury without a revenge! he is no gentleman that doth it. Whether that be so or no, I know not; but sure I am, he is no Christian that doth it not. No, no; whatever our notions of honour be, if we mean to have any benefit of our Christianity, we must be of the temper of the holy Jesus; we must be meek, and gentle, and peaceable, and longsuffering, neither provoking others nor being easily provoked ourselves; rather suffering evil than doing any, nay, and doing good against evil; *For hereunto were we called*, saith the apostle in my text, *hereunto were we called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow his steps: he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened*

not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.

And now I might proceed to discourse of some other particular virtues, which were very conspicuous in our Saviour, and wherein he left us a noble example to follow, shining forth as a light to the paths, and a lantern to the feet, of all the ages and generations of the world; as for instance, his admirable courage and fortitude; his great prudence in the conduct of his life, for the bringing about the ends he proposed to himself; the ingenuous plainness and simplicity he used in all his conversation; and, lastly, his hearty faith and trust in God, and entire dependance on him, and absolute resignation of himself to do his will in all things.

But to treat of these things particularly would engage me in too long a discourse, (and I would finish my text at this time,) and therefore I shall only now touch a little upon the last of them I now mentioned, namely, his continual respect to God in all his conversation; and with that I shall conclude.

It cannot but be taken notice of, that in the history of the great men among the pagans, who have been often recommended to the world for patterns of virtue, there is little of this divine temper of mind to be met with. The pagan heroes seem to be set out to us rather as self-sufficient, independent beings, than as servants and votaries of God Almighty. We meet with great instances among them of the moral human virtues; such as courage, and justice, and temperance, and gratitude, and moderation, and beneficence, and love to their country, and the like; which indeed we cannot deny to be noble and excellent qualities: but we find little in their story of

spiritual and religious virtues, of their love to God, and zeal for his honour and service, and entire dependance upon him in all conditions of life: and yet these are the things that must adorn and perfect human nature, and most of all contribute to the happiness of the world, and of every man in it. This now was a great defect and inconvenience that the world laboured under till our Saviour's appearance. Their notions of virtue were in a manner wholly calculated for the civil life; and a man among them might be accounted virtuous though he was not sincerely pious: whereas in truth it is of the essence of virtue that it should proceed from religion. That is the true virtue indeed, let the object of it be what it will, that is founded in a hearty sense of God and love to him; that inclines a man to live well, and to do good actions, not only because it is decent and reasonable, brave and generous, convenient and useful so to do, but chiefly and principally because God requires it of us; it is his will and pleasure by whom, and to whom, and for whom we live, and tends to his honour and glory that we should thus exercise ourselves. This, I say, is the true notion and idea of that virtue which we ought all to labour after, and in which alone the happiness and perfection of all created natures doth consist: and this is that virtue which Christianity (which is the only true philosophy) doth most affectionately and earnestly recommend to our pursuit; namely, to be so heartily persuaded of the being of God, and of his wisdom, power, goodness, and providence encompassing and watching over all creatures, and to preserve upon our minds such a constant and lively sense of these things, as to love God above all things,

to dread his displeasure more than death, to trust in him, and to depend upon him continually, to resign up ourselves entirely to his conduct and government, to live always as in his presence, and to do all our actions, as much as is possible, with a design of recommending ourselves to him.

O what a glorious example hath our Lord Jesus given us as to all these things! he did truly acknowledge God in all his ways; he set God always before him, and the design of all his actions was to do him service. It was, as he himself tells us, *his meat and drink to do the will of his Father:* nor did he propose any other end in all that he did or all that he suffered, but to bring glory to God's name, and promote his honour in the world. He minded not himself; he had no regard or consideration of his own ease, or convenience, or reputation, or any other thing that is most dear to flesh and blood: but all his aims, all his studies were, that God might be glorified, that his honour and service might be advanced in the world. His whole life was but one continued expression of dependance on the divine providence; for he possessed nothing: nay, he had not so much as the common conveniences of life to trust to; and yet he lived as cheerfully and contentedly by the faith he had in God's goodness, as if he had been possessor of the whole world. It was enough for his support, and enough too to repel the Devil, when he tempted him with want of bread, to consider that *man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.* His meaning was, that God, if it pleased him, could preserve life without human means, and that was enough for him to be satisfied

with his present condition. He had no will of his own; but whatsoever pleased God, that was his will; and even when the bitterest cup was given him to drink that ever was mingled for any of the sons of men, I mean that dreadful agony which he underwent for our sins in the garden, and the painful death that followed it; though as a man, as partaker of the tenderness of human nature, he was so terrified at it, that he could not forbear saying, *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me;* yet so entirely resigned was he even at that time to the will of God, that he immediately corrects the desire of flesh and blood in these words, *Yet, O Father, let it not be as I will, but as thou willest.* He would have God's will done, whatever it cost him.

What lessons now are we to learn from hence? why truly I am afraid almost to number them, considering how the temper of most of us that are his followers generally stands. O what a wide difference is there between us (even those we may account the best among us) and Jesus our Lord and Master as to these things! How narrow and selfish are our spirits! how little regard have we to God's will in all our concernments! Our way is to lay out ourselves upon a hundred things, and eagerly and solicitously to pursue those designs, but without any regard or deference to the pleasure of him that made us and governs us. If our designs prosper, we are pleased; if we have what we desire, and can keep what we love, we are at ease; but if we be disappointed, or if we happen to lose that dear thing we had set our hearts upon, why then we are angry, we are miserable, we are out of humour, like children, and it requires a great deal of time, and no small

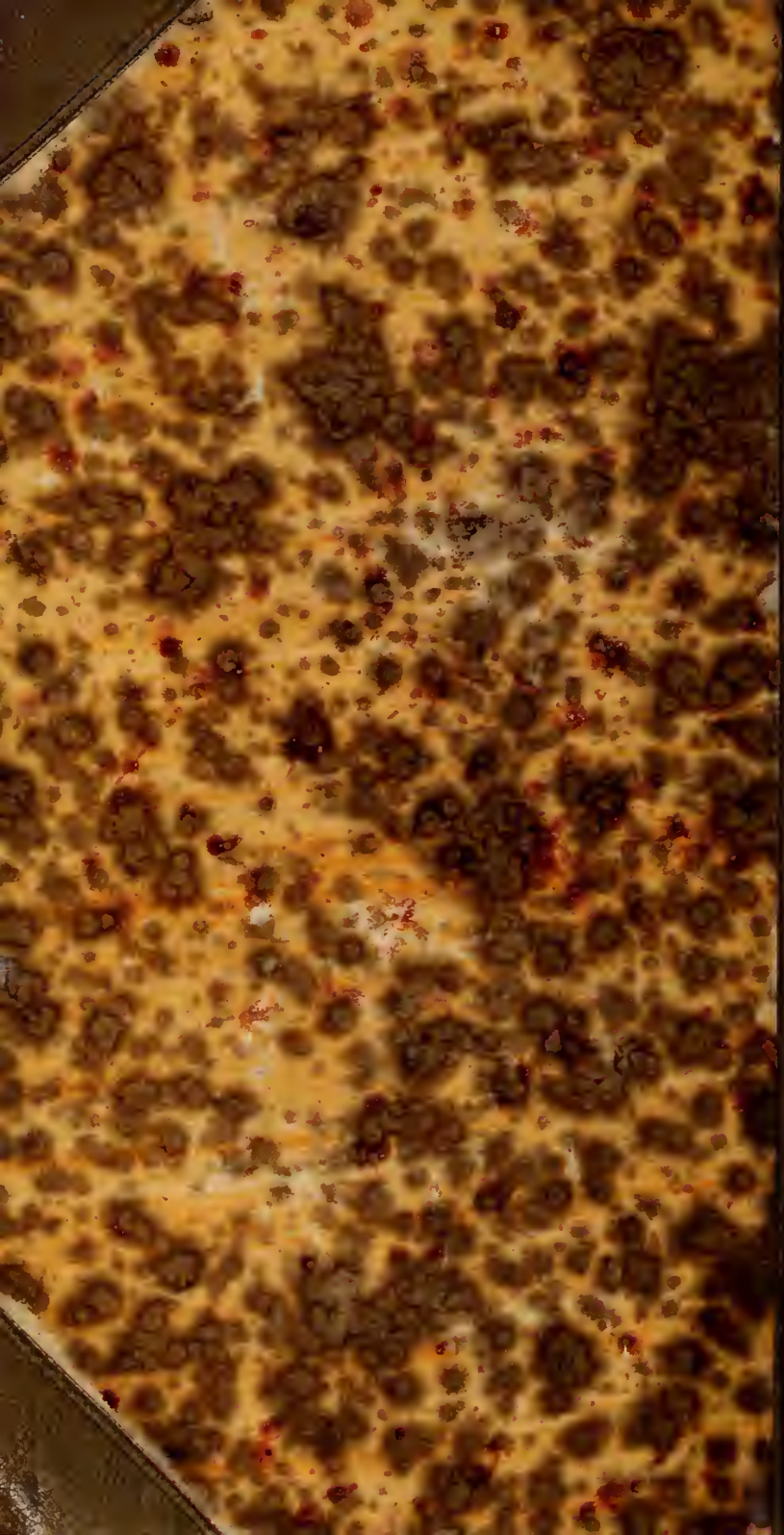
pains, to bring ourselves right again. Thus again, as to our trust in God and dependance on him, we do all of us readily own it as our duty so to do in all circumstances; but, in the name of God, how do we practise it? Why, we are willing to trust God for our livelihood, so long as we have something to live on; we are willing to trust God with any other concern, so long as that concern goes on prosperously; but if our visible supports do chance to fail us, or if the thing we are concerned for seem to go contrary to our desires and expectations, why then our trust in God is gone, and we are as anxious and as querulous and as discontented, as if we were no Christians; or as if indeed there was no God that took care of our affairs. The truth is, most of us do live too much without God; though we talk much of him, yet we have little respect to him in our designs and actions. We say our prayers to him perhaps, and have our constant times of appearing before him for religious worship, (and assuredly, as things go, even this is a great virtue.) But take us out of our devotions, I doubt God is not much in our thoughts; at least our love, our fear, our sense of him, doth not much influence either our words or our actions. Indeed our conversation, generally speaking, is so managed, as if we were no way concerned with God, had nothing at all to do with him, save just at the time we are making solemn addresses to him. But all this is infinitely different from the spirit and temper of our Lord Jesus, and the way that he lived in the world. If we mean to follow his example, we must be religious, as he was; we must endeavour to possess our hearts with such a vigorous sense of God, and his presence, and sovereignty over us, as most

entirely to devote ourselves to his service; so that the fear and love and sense of him shall have some power and influence upon the government of our whole lives. We must make it the business of every day's conversation to serve him, and promote his interest in the world, and not think we have well acquitted ourselves towards him by now and then offering up a few prayers. We must acknowledge him in all our ways, by owning all the good we do enjoy or hope for to be the mere effect of his bounty; by bearing patiently and quietly all the hard things we suffer, though, as we think, never so undeservedly; by reposing our trust and confidence in him in all the extremities we are reduced to; by applying to him for succour or direction or support, under all temptations and difficulties; and, lastly, by resigning ourselves entirely (as far as the imperfection of our present state will allow) to his will, being heartily willing to be whatever he would have us to be, being willing to do whatever he would have us to do, and being willing to suffer whatever he thinks fit to lay upon us. This is to love, this is to serve, this is to honour and glorify God as our blessed Lord and Master did; this is to walk as we have him for an example. And indeed this, and this alone, is the true spirit of Christianity, and the true principles from whence all the other duties of our religion, whether they respect our neighbours or ourselves, will naturally flow. And for your encouragement to labour after such a frame and temper of soul, I will add this, that this is the certain and never-failing method, not only to sweeten all the labours and troubles that we meet with in this life, and to make our passage through this world, in all

conditions and circumstances, easy and comfortable; but also to anticipate the joys of heaven, to have some share of the happiness above, even while we live here below, through the ineffable peace, and contentment, and satisfaction, and pleasure that will continually arise in our minds from the having our wills thus united to God's will.

And thus I have said what I intended about the life of our Saviour. God Almighty give a blessing to it, that we may all so consider this example which he left, that we may follow his steps.

Which God of his infinite mercy grant, &c.

END OF VOL. III.

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